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Vol. XXXI.



"THERE, YOU SEE, INSPECTOR," THE SUPERINTENDENT WENT ON, POINTING AS HE SPOKE, "IS THE UNMISTAKABLE MARK WHERE A BIG RING HAS LONG BEEN WORN."

OR,
The Strangest Case on Record.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

REVEALS A REMARKABLE CASE.

"SILENT SETH, say somethin'. If you ever talked, talk now. Do somethin' to relieve me, for this canker o' curiosity is eatin' at my very vitals."

"No use talking when you haven't anything to say, Harry."

The two boys were in the Signal Detective's office, in the absence of Broadway Billy, and Harry had just been running over the points in a case which had been baffling their combination for some days.

"Talk anyhow, whether you have got anything to say or not," Harry urged. "You must have some ideas in that sealed-up pate of yours, while I haven't a single one. I haven't had the ghost of an idea for two days and a half. If I don't get relief soon there will be a cheap funeral here."

"No use, Harry; if I had anything special to say I'd say it, you know that. This case knocks me out completely."

The case in question was no trifling one. It was the third day, now, since Broadway Billy had taken hold of it, and little if any progress had been made.

A peculiar case—peculiar in more respects than one, one that seemed to have no beginning, and did not appear likely to have any ending. So, at any rate, Harry looked at it.

"Well, you have got to talk, and that is all there is about it," declared the loquacious Harry. "This sitting around like a sphinx is played out. You may enjoy it, but it is killing me by inches of slow torture, and I can't stand it. Open your head, now, and say something right to the point."

"It isn't necessary for me to talk, Harry, when you do talking enough for both of us; and I can't talk unless I have got something to say, that is all there is about it. But, you needn't let my silence keep your rattler from going; just rattle away all you want to. And if you want to ask questions, go ahead; I never refuse to answer proper questions."

Harry's face lighted up at that.

"Well, it's some relief to get that much out of you," he declared. "You have not strung so many words together in a week, and I'll bet on it. And, if you will answer questions I'm going to fire some at you."

Silent Seth made no rejoinder, but waited for the questions.

"I'm going to sum up these points in brief," he declared, "and every time I shoot a question off at you I want to hear the bell ring. See? Now, three nights ago Humphrey Haldemyer, the millionaire, had his safe robbed, and that safe was set in the wall in his private residence.

"Haldemyer was a peculiar man—I'm talkin' hors' sense, now, same as the boss would tell it. He was peculiar, and hadn't much faith in banks. He had all his papers and spare cash in this safe. Nobody else knew the combination. And, for the greater protection of his boodle, he had a devil's own arrangement set to catch any one who might tamper with it, a trap that would cut a person's hand off slick and clean.

"Well, the day before yesterday morning the housekeeper, a Mrs. Gernsey, discovered old Haldemyer dead in the library, the room where the safe is, with a big knife sticking in him. The safe was open, and it had been robbed of about everything that was worth taking. And, on the floor was a woman's hand, clipped off slick and clean at the wrist by the infernal machine, and blood was spattered all around where it bad spurted from her arm.

"Now, who was that woman?"

"I give it up," Seth promptly answered.

"That's the way to speak up, ejaculated Harry, "though I wish you could give the answer to every riddle I fire at you."

"Now, it was a woman's left hand, and the doctors have said it was the hand of a young person, not over twenty years old. It was soft and white, and there was a mark on the third finger, showing where a broad ring had been worn. The ring was missing, as if it had been taken off after the hand had been severed. Now, how did that woman get the ring off with only one hand to do it with?"

"I give it up."

"That's no better than I can do myself, Seth. I want a guess of some sort, and I'm going to have it. Answer again."

"Well, I guess, then, that the woman wasn't alone, but had some one with her, and the other person took the ring off for her. That's about as wild a guess as I can give."

"That is sound enough, I reckon. It ain't likely the woman would feel like going ahead and robbing the safe, after she had lost one hand. She would be in too much pain. Then, she couldn't do it. It was a two-handed job, as everybody admits. It is plain there was two of 'em."

Seth's silence was his approval.

"But, then, that ain't original with you, Seth, for that's one argyment the police set up. Let's take it for granted there was two of 'em, then. Why did they not take the hand with 'em instead of takin' off the ring and leavin' it there?"

"Probably they did not know what to do with it."

"That's about as close as you could be expect-

ed to come at it, for the woman couldn't carry it herself, having all she could do with her one hand to attend to the stump where the other had been cut off; and the man—if the other person was a man—had all he could do to take care of the plunder."

"Let me ask you a question, Harry."

"Ha! got something to say, have you? Out with it!"

"Supposing the other person to have been a man, why was it the woman opened the safe and got caught?"

Happy Harry scratched his head.

"That's a poser, Seth, sure enough," he declared. "I give it up. You give the answer."

"I can't answer it, unless it was the woman who had the key to the combination, and they didn't know anything about the knife trap."

"But, how could any one have knowledge of the combination and yet not know anything about the infernal machine?"

"Give it up."

"You see, this trap was known to the old man's friends, for he wouldn't have anybody hurt with it for the world if he could help it. It was put on the last thing at night and was taken off the first thing in the morning. Anybody that went to monkey with the safe between times would get hurt, sure. So, it is plain enough that the woman didn't know anything about the trap."

Seth nodded.

"It proves itself," Harry argued, "for no one would lose a hand for money, in a cool way like that. Then, the noise of the trap brought the old man down, and by the time he got there the robbers had the safe open, which proves that they had the combination down fine. No doubt about this part of it, for the knife with which he was killed had been in the safe. That's one point where all the detectives agree, and we'll have to fall in line."

Seth nodded again.

"So, there is the case, and it's enough to discourage the ghost of Vidocq. I am losin' flesh over it every hour, and if we don't get hold of a clue pretty soon you will see me turn up my toes and make a die of it. If they could only find a woman with a missin' hand, that would be somethin', even though it proved to be a washerwoman with hard and horny hands, and so old that she's toothless. It would be somethin', for that is the lay the police are on, every man of 'em. And, here we sit, doin' nothin', like the pair of chumps we are."

Seth's silence gave assent.

"I'll tell you what it is, Silent Seth," Harry assured, "I would like to go in and solve this mystery, and get ahead of every man of them. Wouldn't that be bully? I wish we could strike a clue and work it out ourselves. But, then, we couldn't do it that way, for it would be our duty to tell the boss and let him handle it. It would be all the same, though, so long as our combination got there with both feet and the banner was kept wavin'. Why can't somethin' happen? I tell you, Seth, as I said before, this is killing me by inches," and the "rattler" paused for breath.

"Are you done, now?" Seth asked.

"Might as well be, I suppose. We are stumped, bad."

Seth was on the point of saying something when the door opened.

The person who entered was one of the detectives of the Metropolitan force.

"Where is Broadway Billy, boys?" he at once demanded.

"Out scouring for a clue to the Haldemyer mystery," answered Harry.

Harry and Seth knew the man, so Harry's reply was all right.

"When will he be in?"

"Hard to tell; may be here in ten minutes or not in ten hours."

"You do not know where to look for him, do you?"

"No use trying that. We are waiting for him here, to report and get instructions."

"Well, when he comes in just tell him the superintendent has sent for him and would like to see him at the office."

Harry sprung to his feet in excitement, but Seth sat as calm and imperturbable as ever, his face showing no change.

"Have they found a clue?" Harry eagerly demanded.

The detective smiled.

"Well, yes, since you are so eager to know, they have," he responded.

"A clue to the Haldemyer, I mean," Harry urged. "Have they really got a clue to that?"

"Yes, that's the case I mean."

"Bully!" and Harry gave his leg a slap to ex-

press his delight. "What is it? Can you tell us? I'm dyin' to know, for I don't believe I have had a sleep or wink since we took the case in hand."

The detective had to laugh at his earnestness.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said, "since I know Broadway Billy trusts you with everything: We have found a young woman whose left hand was cut off on the same night of the robbery and murder at Haldemyer's. The chief wants to see your boss to let him work it up."

"Hooray!" yelled Harry, and he turned a couple of cart-wheels across the floor to give vent to his supreme delight.

He was turning in the direction of the door, and just as he came up from the last revolution the door opened and he came near coming into collision with Broadway Billy.

"What's broke loose here?" Billy demanded.

"Oh, they have got a clue at last, and the super wants you," Harry cried.

"What is the clue?" Billy inquired, turning to the detective, whose presence he had immediately noted.

"A young woman has been discovered who lost her left hand on the night of the murder. Her name is Julia Donaldson, and she lives at No. — street. She is the promised wife of Clyde Rosedale."

"Old Haldemyer's nephew, eh? This begins to look as though we were getting at the thing in good shape. The nephew and the old gentleman never got along very well together, as I have found out. Can it be that this girl had a hand in the robbery?"

"If she had she lost it there, that is a dead open-and-shut."

CHAPTER II.

BROADWAY BILLY'S COMMISSION.

"CHRISTOPHER COLUMBIA! how good I feel!" cried Harry, and he executed a momentary double shuffle in the middle of the office floor. "Now we have got something to work on!"

"Does the boy get taken that way often?" asked the visitor, of Billy.

"It is just about as hard to hold Harry within bounds as it is to stir Seth up to any show of emotion whatever," Billy responded.

"Well, there is some excuse for his jubilation this time, for the whole force is enthusiastic over the discovery of this young woman with the missing left hand, all the circumstances being as they are."

"Who got the clue? or, that is, made the discovery?"

"Channing. It was a game of chance with us, you know. One was as likely to strike it as another, and it fell to him."

"Yes, it was argued that a woman who had had her hand cut off would require medical aid, and a thorough visitation of all the doctors in the city was begun. It was a big undertaking."

"But, when the chief undertakes a thing he does not do it by halves. He thought of the plan, and Williams carried it out. They are a team, I tell you, and the criminal who can hide long from them has got to be a pretty shrewd fellow. As I said, Channing drew the prize."

"Who was the doctor?"

"One Dr. Nebson, who lives just around the corner from the address I mentioned. Channing dropped in on him, and when he put the question the doctor owned right up."

"No attempt at concealment, eh?"

"None whatever."

"How was the matter mentioned to him?"

"In the way Williams ordered. The men were working as reporters, and were to ask abruptly how the patient with the lost hand was getting on. When Channing asked it, the doctor responded that she was doing as well as could be expected."

"And he was told who she was, without any attempt at holding back?"

"Yes, unhesitatingly, Channing says. But, right there we are brought up against a dead-wall."

"What is that?"

"Why, they say the young woman had her hand cut off in the railroad accident that happened on the Central on that same night. Several were killed and quite a large number more or less hurt, you remember."

"You say it is the left hand that's missing?"

"That is what Channing has reported."

"It is straight enough, then. Well, the truth of her story has got to be put to the test, that is the only way. If it is straight, then it is only a remarkable coincidence and nothing more."

"And that is what you are wanted to find out I think."

"Why does the superintendent select me?"

"Because half a dozen of us have failed of getting an interview with the young woman."

"I don't see how he expects me to do anything in the matter, then, if that is the case. Well, report that I'll be there inside of half an hour."

"All right, sir; I'll do it," and the man took his leave.

"Well, here seems to be a starting-point at last, boys," Billy observed to his "team."

"And it's likely to be the ending point, too, if you can bring the proof home to her," remarked Harry.

"Which may prove anything but an easy task, for, if guilty, she will use all the art she is capable of to deny it."

"It ought not to be difficult to find whether she was in the railroad accident or not," offered Silent Seth. "If she was, she will prove it without any trouble."

"And even if she was not, she had had time enough to get seeming proof, if her helper is as smart as we set him down to be."

"Then you set the helper down for a man?" asked Harry.

"Yes. That is the general belief, for various reasons. Since you are my apprentices, so to call you, I will tell you why these conclusions have been reached. In the first place, the position of the knife in the dead man's body proved it to have been driven there by the assassin's left hand. That is proof the woman did not do the deed. Then, the force of the blow indicates that it was a man who struck it."

"Where's my hat," demanded Harry.

"What do you want with your hat?" Billy made inquiry.

"I'm going back to my old trade. I'll never make a detective. I'd never see all these points in the world."

Billy laughed, as he added:—

"I did not discover them myself, Harry, but got them from the superintendent. You can't expect to learn your profession in a day. Don't think of giving up, for I have work for you to do."

That settles it, and Harry was all eagerness to learn what he had to do.

"I want you to go immediately to that house and see that wounded girl," Billy explained.

"It is a piece of work you can do better than I or any of the men on the force. You and Seth go together."

This brought Seth to the front.

"What excuse can we offer?" he asked.

"Can't you invent one that will carry you through?"

Harry scratched his head again, while Seth knit his brows in a brown study.

"I don't know about that," Harry declared. "If men couldn't get in, I don't see the use of sending kids like us. What do you say, Seth?"

"If we only knew of some particular friend of the girl's," Seth spoke thoughtfully, "we might go with a bouquet of flowers and make mention of that friend's name."

"Even that might not help you, though the idea is a good one," answered Billy. "When I was your age I would have found some way for getting into the house, I think. I'll tell you what might work, perhaps, but it will all depend on yourselves."

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"Go first to the doctor's office and ask his prescription for a spray for a sick-room, and when you have got it, get it filled and take it to the house; and saying you have just come from the doctor, insist upon going up to the room to do the spraying yourself."

"I'll do it!" cried Harry, "and I'll get into that room or bu'st a button trying."

"And I'll stick to my own idea about the bouquet," declared Seth. "I think I can make that scheme work."

"If you do get in," Billy further directed, "find out all you can, and whether she wore a ring or not. Be sure on that point. Come back here as soon as you are done."

When the lads set forth upon their errand Billy locked the office and went to answer the call he had received from the superintendent, to learn what he wanted.

When he arrived there he entered in his usual respectful way.

"Well, Billy, we think we have struck a clue in the Haldemyer case," was the greeting.

"So your man told me," Billy answered.

"What have you got laid out for me to do?"

"I want you to interview that girl."

"Do you think I can do it?"

"If there is a man in New York who can do it, you are the one. Three of my own men have tried and failed, as well as two women."

"It looks as though I might as well give it up right here and now," Billy remarked. "It is

plain they are determined no one shall see the young woman."

"And that is just the reason why I am determined that some one *shall* see her," the great crook-catcher declared, grimly. "Now, I have the greatest confidence in you, Billy Weston, and I want you to do this bit of work for me."

"What excuse has been made to those who have been refused?" Billy asked.

"Why, there is a veritable grenadier of a butler who meets them at the door, and they are told flatly and blankly that they cannot see the young woman, and that is the end of it."

"What excuses have they made?"

"All excuses. Don't go there as a reporter, for that has been done to death."

"Thank you; I have no desire to present myself in that capacity. I'll see if I can't invent some dodge newer than that. But, what is it you want me to find out?"

"We must know whether this young woman was in that railroad accident or not, for, under the circumstances, there is good reason for suspecting her of the crime of that night, or a share in it."

"And if she was on the train—"

"If she was, find out where she had been and all the particulars of her journey. Suspicion is strong in her direction, for she was at home at four o'clock on that afternoon, as I have positively ascertained."

"That does look strange," Billy remarked. "The train to which the accident came was a through train, was it not?"

"Yes. How did she get aboard of it?"

"It was due in the city about ten-thirty, I believe."

"Just so; but, owing to the blockade the passengers did not get in till about midnight."

"And, according to the story told by the murdered man's housekeeper, the crime was not done earlier than half-past eleven, for she was up at that hour."

"You see there is good reason for looking into this girl's case, the very best of reasons, for on that night she lost her left hand at the wrist. I would be justified in arresting her this minute upon suspicion."

"But, you no not want to do that."

"For the reason you can see. It would give the other a chance to escape. We must trap him through this girl."

"Well, I will do the best I can to serve you, but seeing that so many have failed I will not promise anything. I'll try my art against that butler, however, and see what will come of it."

"Do so, and then report to me. I don't mind telling you, Weston, that you are one of the best trumps in my hand."

Billy blushed at this compliment, and when he took his leave it was with the fixed determination to interview the wounded girl if it took him a week to accomplish his purpose.

He went back to his office, there to await the return of his "Beagles" before setting forth upon his mission. If they had been successful, and had gleaned the right sort of information, it would not be necessary for him to go, perhaps.

CHAPTER III.

BILLY'S BEAGLES BEATEN.

In the mean time Happy Harry and Silent Seth had gone about the business in hand in a business-like way.

On the way to the office of Dr. Nelson, Silent Seth stopped and purchased a fine bouquet, Billy having supplied him and Harry with money to carry out their plans.

That done, they went on, and Seth waited at a corner while Harry went to the doctor's office.

He rung the bell, and a colored youth let him in.

"I want to see the doctor," Harry announced, briefly.

"All right, sah: he is in. There is one pusson in ahead of yo', sah."

Harry waited, and in a few minutes that "pusson" came out from the inner office, and he entered.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" the doctor asked.

"I have been sent to ask you for a prescription for a spray for a sick-room," Harry explained.

"A spray for a sick-room? What kind of a spray do you mean?"

"Well, you see there is a bad smell, and they want to get rid of it. As we did not know what to use I was sent to ask a doctor. See?"

"What is the nature of the sickness?"

"Why, the party got jammed up in the railroad accident the other night, and they have had to cut and saw pretty lively, and—"

"Well, I can give you what you want, young man, but, you had better go and summon the

attending physician and tell him about this bad smell, as you call it. You had better let him attend to it."

"Yes, they expect him to call, sir; but, they want to get rid of this smell as soon as possible, and thought any doctor would give the prescription. If you don't want to give it say so, and I'll drop the dollar into some other man's pocket. Talk lively, for I have no time to monkey."

The doctor smiled.

"You are full of business, I see," he observed.

"Well, I'll oblige you, although it is not in accord with professional courtesy for one physician to intrude upon another's ground. However, this is in the nature of an outside matter, and here you are, young gentleman."

He had dashed off a hasty prescription while talking, and handed it to Harry as he concluded.

Paying him, Harry hastened out and rejoined Seth.

"Get it?" Seth asked.

"You bet!" was the assurance.

It was hastily arranged, then, that Harry should go to the house first, Seth to follow immediately behind him so that both could get into the room together, if possible.

So, Seth lagged behind while Harry hastened forward to the number, where he gave a tug at the bell.

The door was opened by a big man, fully six feet tall, one whose face was enough to frighten the average boy at sight of him.

"What's wanted?" he asked, gruffly.

"I have come from the office of Doctor Nelson," Harry told him. "I have come to spray the room where the sick lady is."

"Did the doctor send you?"

"Didn't I just say so?" Harry demanded.

"Don't be too smart with your lip," the man snarled.

"Well, what more do you want to know about me?"

"Did he send the stuff to do the spraying with?"

"Yes, and I'm to do the spraying myself and bring the stuff away with me, too," Harry snapped.

"Well, we will have something to say about that, I guess, young man. Give me the stuff and I'll take it up and let the nurse do the spraying. You can wait here in the hall till it's done."

"My orders are to do it myself," urged Harry.

"I don't care what your orders are. Mine are to let no one come up to that room, and I'm going to carry them out. You can either do as I say, or go back to the doctor. You want to make up your mind quick, too. I have about lost my patience this day, I can tell you."

"Well, you needn't eat a fellow up," Harry complained. "My orders are as good to me as yours can be to you, and if you won't let me into the room I'll go back, as you say. I'm not as big as you are, but I weigh just as many ounces to the pound, what there is of me. So, make up your mind what you are going to do about it. I can't leave the spray, either, and I can't wait."

Silent Seth had been lagging along close at hand, his eyes upon Harry, ready to run forward as soon as he saw him enter.

As Harry did not enter with any degree of promptitude, however, Seth's spirits began to droop, and he doubted their getting in at all.

Certainly if Harry could not get in, there was little use for him to try it, for Harry's excuse was by long odds the better, so he reasoned.

Having now come so near to the house that there was no excuse for further delay, he advanced and mounted the steps just as Harry concluded his outburst.

"Well, go back, then," growled the butler. "Let the doctor come and do the work himself, if it is so mighty particular that we can't be trusted to do it. What do you want, young fellow?"

The last to Seth, Harry's case having been disposed of without appeal.

Harry stepped back to the railing and allowed Seth to have the floor, so to express it.

"I have been sent with this bouquet, and with a special message for Miss Donaldson," Seth explained, politely.

"All right; give me the flowers and say what the message is, and I'll see that both are delivered promptly," the butler said.

He spoke politely but firmly, and held out his hand for the flowers.

Seth drew back with them.

"Pardon," he said, "but I am to deliver them in person, and give the message myself, if you please."

"It can't be done, positively," the big man de-

clared. "No one is allowed in that room. You will have to leave the flowers and message with me or take them away again, that is all."

"But, sir, it is very im—"

"No use to parley; my orders are positive. Make up your mind quick what you will do."

The butler stepped back and made a motion as if to shut the door upon them, as was certainly his intention, but at that moment a man sprung lightly up the steps, pausing behind the boy to allow him to finish his business before he interfered.

"Well, I'll take them back again," said Seth, "for I came here to deliver them in person, and if I can't do that I won't deliver them at all. Good-day, sir!"

He drew aside and allowed the gentleman to take his place, but hesitated about departing, as if debating whether he should leave the bouquet or not, and so he and Harry heard what the man had to say.

The man was a gentleman of middle age, lean and sprightly, with iron-gray hair and a beard of the same color closely cropped.

"How'd'y, Jones?" he greeted. "I have come in response to your mistress's summons, to see about adjusting her claim against the railroad. Please tell her I am here."

"All right, Mr. Metkoff; step into the parlor, sir."

The caller had pressed in while speaking, and now the butler closed the door without even so much as another look at the boys.

Harry immediately took off his hat and put it under his arm, making the door a profound bow.

Seth had turned away and was descending the steps to the sidewalk.

"That seems to cook our goose, Seth," Harry observed, as he joined him. "What do you say if we desert the banner and go back to leather-polishing?"

"We couldn't do what was impossible, that is certain, Harry," Seth made answer.

"Cause we haven't brains enough. I feel as though I would make a big success at blackenin' stoves, or somethin' in that line. Christopher Columbia! but I hate to go back to the boss."

"That is what we have got to do, though, and report a failure."

"Slink in like a pair of whipped curs, a couple of tail-down kyoodles, hey! I like that. I've a notion to disguise and tackle the job again."

"It won't do, Harry."

"Why?"

"Boss told us to come back if we failed, you know."

"That's so; but all the same I've a notion to give it one more rub before I give it up."

"How would you do it?"

"I don't know, but—"

"Neither do I, so we had better give it up and not fool away any time. We haven't quite scored a skunk, anyhow."

"Not scored a skunk! What do you call it, then? It's the cleanest whitewash we ever got in our lives."

"You forgot that we picked up one little item by the way."

"I'd like to know what it is, that's all."

"Why, that Mr. Metkoff is a lawyer, I take it, and he has been sent for to set about entering a claim against the railroad—"

"Crackers an' cheese! that's so, and I was so mad with the butler that it got away from me for the moment. That makes it look as though the railroad accident story is true."

"Yes; so it now seems."

"Why, Seth, you are s'prisin' me so I won't get any more growth this month. You are talkin' right along. But, I don't want to stop you; keep it up."

"Because I had something to say, that's the reason. You don't find me wasting much breath unless I have."

"Well, you needn't cork up now, just 'cause I called your 'tention to it."

"I'm done; nothing more to say, Harry."

Harry had more to say, though, and his tongue rattled on merrily all the way to the office.

There they found Billy awaiting them, and Harry walked in, his hat under his arm and a very sheepish look upon his face.

Seth's face and manner were as imperturbable as ever, and there was no guessing there whether his mission had been a success or a failure. But, the bouquet told the story.

"Well, they balked you, did they?" Billy at once observed, smiling.

"That's no name for it, boss," said Harry, humbly. "They choked us off in the worst kind of way, 'cept for one little point that Seth picked up."

CHAPTER IV.

MASTER MINDS MEDITATE.

MEANWHILE, Broadway Billy had not been long gone from the office of Superintendent Byrnes when Inspector Williams entered.

"What are we going to do in the case of that Donaldson girl?" the inspector asked.

"Has your last effort turned out a failure, too?" inquired the superintendent.

"Yes, a blank failure. It is impossible to get past that butler at the door. It can't be done."

"Don't say that, for it can be done. We have not half begun to try yet. We could go and make the arrest as a last resort, you know."

"But, you want to avoid that."

"It is not to be thought of, at present. In the first place, we might make a mistake; and then, too, that would give the accomplice the alarm. No, it must be done by art, somehow."

"But, how?"

"Well, we will not trouble our heads with it till we see whether my latest effort turns out a blank."

"Your latest effort?"

"Yes; for when you reported that Miss Goldborrow had failed I did not think it possible that Simpson would succeed, as you say he too has failed, and I sent for Broadway Billy."

"The young man you have taken such a liking to, eh? You don't suppose for a moment that he will succeed, do you?"

"If he fails I shall be very much disappointed in him."

"But, how is he going to try it?"

"I don't know; he has full liberty to go about it in his own way. We will let the case rest till we hear from him, now."

"But, we will keep on with the canvass of the doctors of the city?"

"Yes; for, if this young woman was really hurt in the railroad accident the other must be somewhere, and we must find her. But, from the appearance of things now, I do not think we have need to look further."

"Well, I hope Broadway Billy succeeds, and it will be a tall feather in his hat if he does. I'll have full confidence in him then. But, he has got a bad man to tackle, in that butler, let me tell you."

"Well, we'll see. Have you taken steps regarding Clyde Rosedale?"

"Yes, I have sent a reliable man to Philadelphia to look out for him and see whether he really comes in on the train from the West or not. He has a photograph of him and can't miss his man."

"He ought to arrive here this afternoon."

"Yes, barring accidents. If he started from St. Louis at the time he telegraphed he would, he will reach Philadelphia in about half an hour from now. He stated that he would come that way, you know. It does not look reasonable to suspect him, do you think it does?"

"No man is to be held above suspicion, as you are fully aware. This fellow Rosedale is the one who will be most benefited by the death of Haldemyer. He is the next of kin, and in the absence of a will he scoops everything, to the barring out of a host of more distant relations."

"That is so; but, if he was in St. Louis at the time the murder was done, then he positively did not do the deed himself."

"Assuredly not; and that is just what we are undertaking to find out. If he comes in from the West to Philadelphia, it will be reasonably certain that his alibi is good. If, on the other hand, he takes the train at Philadelphia, as that fellow Dooley did, he will come here under arrest and we shall have a pretty good case against him. It looks bad enough for him as it is."

"Yes, since this young woman Donaldson has turned out to be his promised wife. It is a strange case, superintendent."

"It is, positively. And, in any event, as we have agreed, this fellow Rosedale is to be shadowed from the moment he sets foot in this city."

"I have prepared to do that."

"Good. We have a hard nut to crack here, and nothing must be left undone that is likely to throw any light upon the mystery."

"It is a wonderful case, is it not?"

"A remarkable case. It is clouded in mystery."

"And the more I study it the more mysterious it grows, too."

"Let us glance briefly at the facts once more. Humphrey Haldemyer, millionaire, murdered in the library of his residence by persons who had entered to rob his safe. On the safe was an attachment calculated to chop off the hand of any person tampering with the lock. The knife with which the deed was done is said to have been kept locked in the safe. From this fact we

have drawn the conclusions that, hearing the trap spring, Haldemyer hastened down to the room. By that time the safe had been opened, by which we know the person opening it had full knowledge of the combination. It is said that no person but the murdered man himself had that knowledge."

"Strange, strange."

"Yes, and yet more strange. Let us imagine ourselves there. The trap has sprung, cutting off the woman's hand. Haldemyer has heard it, and is coming down. The woman grasps her spouting arm with her right hand, uttering not a scream, for had she done so the household would have been alarmed. The man—you understand the reasons why we judge it to have been a man with her—pays no attention to the woman and her wound, but immediately opens the safe. He hears the old man coming in haste to the room. He sees the knife, and taking it up, meets the old gentleman at the door and stabs him before he can utter a sound. The body, you know, was found near the door opening into the hall. Back to the safe, then, he returns, and gathers up the valuables; or, perhaps, temporarily binds up the woman's wound first; and then together they hasten away from the scene. I ask you, who were these persons?"

"The question is too heavy for me, sir."

"It is a puzzling one, truly. Then, there is the matter of the missing ring, which had slipped my mind for the moment. Just bring that hand here, will you?"

The inspector stepped out, soon returning with a big glass jar, in which, preserved in alcohol, was the woman's hand which had been found upon the scene of the double crime. This jar was placed on the desk by which the superintendent sat.

"There, you see, inspector," the superintendent went on, pointing as he spoke, "is the unmistakable mark where a big ring has long been worn. It was worn up to the very time of the crime. Otherwise the mark would not be so plain as it is. The ring has been slightly tight for the finger, you will observe. Now, if that ring was on the finger when the hand was severed, it was taken off before the two persons left the scene of the crime. Looking at it in that light, the proof is the stronger that there were two persons—indeed there must have been two, looking at the matter from the standpoint we are assuming. Then, again, we have to take the view that the woman, at least, knew nothing about the trap she was putting her hand into. If the man did know about it, he was a diabolical villain, and nothing short of it. And the woman—what a nerve she had, not to scream!"

"The more you look into it the more baffling it grows."

"You are right, for there is something altogether out of reason in all this. Let us look at the case of the young woman who has fallen under suspicion. We set about finding a young woman who had lost her left hand on that night, and we have found her. Miss Julia Donaldson, a young lady of twenty, talented and accomplished, rich, only child of a widowed mother. On this fatal night she lost her left hand in a railway accident, it is said. Is this true? Taking the view that it is not, but that she is the one who lost her hand in Mr. Haldemyer's library, we can account for the privacy in which she is kept on that ground. We have found that she is the affianced bride of Clyde Rosedale, Haldemyer's nephew, absent in St. Louis at the time of the crime. She has been at Haldemyer's several times since her engagement. She ought to have known about the trap on the safe. Would she go willingly and put her hand into it? If so, what powerful motive actuated her in doing so?"

"I am half inclined to think her innocent."

"But, look at the terrible proof against her. We know she wore a large ring, on this same finger of her left hand. Here is a left hand with the mark of a ring. We know that she lost her left hand on the very night of the crime, though the explanation is given how she lost it. But, she was at home at four o'clock that afternoon. The train she claims to have been on was a through train from the West. Where did she go to get aboard that train? What was her object in making such a visit out in the country? These through trains do not stop at small stations. She could not go far between that time and the time she must have boarded the train to which the accident occurred. She had the very briefest business imaginable at the place where she went, for the accident occurred quite a distance from the city. All these points must be explained away before suspicion can be removed from her, for the main point, the loss of her

hand, is of the strongest kind. But, why should she, young, beautiful, rich, go to this house upon such an errand? With whom did she go? Which of the pair knew the combination of the safe? If she, why did she not know about the knife steel-trap as well?"

"I am almost bewildered, and I freely admit it. It is more than I can grasp, I am afraid."

"It is more than any of us can grasp, at this stage. You see the importance of an interview with the woman herself."

"Yes, and I see the difficulty in getting at it. If she did do the crime, or had a share in it, no one is going to be allowed to question her, be sure of that."

"As a last resort we will arrest her, but I want to delay that step to the very last moment, in order to allay suspicion and also in order not to commit a blunder if we are wrong in suspecting her."

"And that brings us back to Broadway Billy."

"Yes, and I anxiously await his report. We must give him time, however. He has scarcely started."

"I am afraid he will meet with the same defeat the others have met with. They are determined no one shall see that girl, and that big butler is going to carry out his instructions."

"Broadway Billy is his equal."

"By saying that you place that lad above our best men."

"Not by any means, not by any means. But, every man is gifted differently, in most things."

"My argument has been that Broadway Billy's success has been built upon luck, and I am not ready yet to surrender that position."

"Call it luck if you will; you cannot deny that he has a way of getting there, so to say, whether it is through luck or whatever. He was remarkable even when a little urchin on the streets."

"So I admit, there. Well, if he performs the work which has been set for him this time, I'll agree with you wholly in your estimate of his native ability as a detective. Will you allow me to be present when he comes to report?"

"I'll send for you before I allow him to open his mouth. And, when your man from Philadelphia arrives, let me have his report at once. If he comes with a prisoner, let him be brought here. Take care that Clyde Rosedale is shadowed from the moment he sets foot in New York."

CHAPTER V.

BILLY BEATS THE BUTLER.

BROADWAY BILLY was anxious to learn what his "team" had to report, and lost no time in getting at the facts.

"I hardly thought you would succeed, when you set out," he remarked, when he had heard all. "Still, there was the chance that you might."

"There's one question I want to ask you, boss," said Happy Harry, anything but happy just then, to judge by the downcast expression of his face, for he felt sore over the failure.

"Ask it, Harry."

"Could you have done any better, at our age?"

"Not a bit," Billy encouraged. "I can see that you did your best. No man can do more."

"But, you would have gone into that house, somehow, now wouldn't you? You would not have given up like we did, would you?"

"Putting myself in your place, I would have done just the same as you did, but perhaps not half so well. If we had been boys together, you would have been my match, either of you."

"You couldn't have got left any finer, that is a sure thing," Harry observed, and lapsed into silence.

"And what is going to be done now?" Silent Seth inquired.

"I will tell you," said Billy. "I have got to go there and try it myself, and what you have reported has given me an idea to work upon."

"I'm glad we brought some good result, anyhow."

"And you certainly did that. But, I must be up and doing. I was at loss for a plan, almost, but now that I have it I will strike while the iron is hot. You can keep the office while I am gone."

A few more words and Broadway Billy hastened away.

In due time he was at the Donaldson residence, where his ring at the bell brought the scowling butler to confront him.

"Does Mrs. Donaldson live here?" Billy inquired.

"She does, sir," was the brief but civil answer he got.

"And it was her daughter who was injured in the accident the other night?"

"It was."

"Then I am at the right place. I am here for the purpose of seeing the injured young woman—"

"You cannot see her, sir."

"I must see her, and so let it be understood. I represent—"

"Can't help what you represent, sir, my orders are to admit no one to see the lady. You will have to call again."

"Is it by the doctor's orders that no one can see her?"

"I have my orders from Mrs. Donaldson. I tell you positively that you cannot see Miss Donaldson to-day."

"And I tell you as positively that I must see her. Do me the favor to take my name to Mrs. Donaldson, telling her that I am here in the interest of—"

"It does not make a particle of difference who you are or whose interest you are here in," growled the butler, "you cannot see Miss Donaldson. Let me have the honor to bid you a civil good-day."

Broadway Billy had taken a slight advantage right at the start.

The moment the door had swung open he had stepped into the hall, bowing with a civil air as he put his first question.

Now he had his back planted firmly against the wall, and nothing but force could remove him so long as he felt like staying, and that seemed to be his mind.

"Don't be quite so fast, my man," he said, in his firm, grim way. "You have not once permitted me to state my business, and I assure you that you are not going to get rid of me until I have done so."

"I have heard enough of your business, sir, to know that you want to see Miss Donaldson, and you most certainly will not be allowed to do so. You can leave your name and address, since you seem so determined, and Mrs. Donaldson will communicate with you at her—"

"I am not going to leave anything until I have fulfilled the business I have in this house," Billy interrupted. "Tell Mrs. Donaldson that I must see her. My name is Washingham, and I have come here for the purpose of learning the extent of the injuries Miss Donaldson sustained in the accident. I am in the service of the—"

"A reporter!" gasped the giant butler, turning a shade pale with rage. "Sir, leave this house before I use force upon you!"

He had taken a step forward toward Billy, but the young detective put up his fists in a threatening way.

"Keep back," he warned. "You are not the master of the house, are you?"

"I am master where my orders are to be obeyed."

"And your business is to announce callers to your mistress, I should think. I order you to carry my name to her."

The big butler was now white with anger, and almost beside himself at being thus defied, after all the trouble he had had with callers since early morning.

"I will not do it, sir. If you do not leave instantly I will throw you out on the sidewalk. Mrs. Donaldson will not see any reporters—"

"I am no reporter. You are letting your imagination run away with you. I am here in the interest of the railroad company, as I would have told you long ago if you had kept your empty head shut. I must see and learn the extent of the injuries the young lady has received. Now, sir, announce me."

The butler was by this time fairly trembling in his rage, and Billy felt that now would come the tug of war, but just as he finished speaking a voice called down from above.

"Jones, who is that person?" was asked.

It was a woman's voice.

"Madam, are you Mrs. Donaldson?" Billy asked, before the butler could reply.

"I am, sir; and who are you?"

"My name is Washingham, representing the railroad company, madam. All this confusion would have been avoided had your butler allowed me to state my business in the first place. I must see your injured daughter, madam, and learn the extent of her injuries."

Billy had to fib to carry his point, but that was not to be helped.

"Jones, show the gentleman into the parlor," the woman directed. "I will be down in a few minutes, sir."

Billy turned to the butler.

That worthy stood with his hand outstretched toward the parlor, and a look of keenest hatred upon his face.

The young detective thought it best not to provoke him further, as there was no necessity for it, and content with his progress so far, entered the parlor and sat down.

Presently he heard steps descending the stairs, and the next moment a woman and a man entered the parlor.

From the description the boys had given he knew the man to be Lawyer Metkoff.

Billy rose and bowed to the woman.

"Mrs. Donaldson?"

"Yes, sir. Let me introduce our lawyer, Mr. Metkoff."

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Metkoff," Billy acknowledged, with an affable nod.

He knew that he would have to be upon his mettle, to hold his own against this man, and he nervously held himself for the contest.

When all had taken seats, Billy was the first to speak.

"As I told you, madam," he said, addressing the woman only, "I am here to learn the extent of your daughter's injuries, and it is part of my business to see her, if that is possible. If not now, I shall have to trouble you with another call."

The woman hesitated, and looked toward her lawyer.

"I see Mrs. Donaldson rather rests upon me to speak in her behalf," that gentleman said.

"May we inquire in what capacity you are connected with the railroad?"

"As a railroad detective, sir," was the calm reply. "On the occasion of accidents like that of the other night, false claims are bound to come up, and the company has to be on its guard against them. I would not hint that this is such, mind you; but, we make no exception in our investigations."

Billy had noted that the woman paled slightly while he spoke.

"And you are here, then, merely to verify the report that Miss Donaldson was injured on your road that night, I understand you?"

"That is it, sir. Claims for damages are to be expected, arising out of every accident that happens, and the company must protect itself against fraudulent ones. And, too, it is more disposed, I think, to settle such matters out of court."

"Ah! indeed! That is to say, for some trifling amount, of course. Sir, we are about to sue your company for fifty thousand dollars damages for the loss of this young lady's hand."

"All the more reason, then, why I should do my duty and seek the proof that the lady was really injured in the accident on our road. The more liberty and assistance you give me in this duty, the more you will enhance your chances for getting satisfaction in the matter of damages."

This was said very politely but very firmly.

"Then I understand you, sir, that you simply desire to see the young lady, see her wound, and so satisfy yourself that we are telling the truth."

"You are right, so far as you go," Billy replied. "If you are willing, we will go and see her at once, and so have that part of my duty done with. I do not want to take up more of your time than cannot be helped."

Billy rose as he spoke, and so did the woman.

The young detective felt that it was the best to urge this point, as his main desire was to get into the room where the wounded young woman was.

"I am perfectly willing to conduct you to the room, sir," the woman said. "I want you to go away with the full assurance that we are setting up no false claim here, but that the facts are just as you understand them."

The lawyer had remained seated yet.

"You spoke, young man," he said, "about my being right as far as I had gone, and also termed this as a part of your duty. What is the rest of your duty? What further matters did you allude to then?"

Billy wished this man well out of his way, but since he was not to be disposed of by a wish he had to accept the situation.

"What else I alluded to, sir," he replied, "was simply the form of asking some questions to prove the young lady was really on the train and was really injured in that particular accident. But, that will be merely a matter of form, after the assurance Mrs. Donaldson has given me."

In this young detective the lawyer had an opponent who was almost a match for him, perhaps quite.

"Very well, Mrs. Donaldson," said the lawyer as he rose, "you may give the young gentleman the proofs he seeks, since, if anything, this will strengthen the claim you will have upon the company, rather than weaken it. I will accom-

pany you, since I may be able to be of service to you. You are about to witness a sad sight, Mr. Washington, let me assure you of that."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW.

BROADWAY BILLY felt jubilant.

Here he was on the threshold of success where others had failed utterly.

But, he took little credit to himself. He felt that he owed it all to his two aides, whose information concerning the lawyer and his business at the house had given him the idea upon which he had acted.

With that idea, any one of the other detectives could have forced the same success, perhaps even more easily than he had accomplished it, he believed.

The woman led the way from the room, but paused at the foot of the stairs to allow the men to precede her, where the lawyer took the lead.

At the top the woman again went ahead, and they were immediately ushered into a splendidly furnished chamber.

At one side of this apartment, just out of the glare of the light from the windows, was a bed, and upon the pillow Billy saw the pale face of a pretty girl.

Near her sat a nurse, in cap and apron, one who had the appearance of being a trained attendant upon the sick, and who left the place immediately and retired to the other side of the room.

Broadway Billy's first emotion upon beholding the fair victim was one of pity.

Could it be possible, he asked himself, that one so young and fair could have been concerned in so dark a crime?

"Julia," spoke the mother, "this gentleman is here from the office of the railroad company. It was necessary for him to come in order to make sure our claim is not a fraud."

The pale face seemed to grow paler still, Billy thought.

"Oh, mamma, why did you bring him here?" the girl asked, pleadingly. "You know I told you I could see no one—positively no one."

"But, dear, Mr. Metkoff said it were better to admit him and show him the proof he desires. It will be better for the interests of the suit we intend to bring against the company."

"And I assure you I will make my stay as brief as possible," Billy spoke up.

The girl glanced at him, a look of pleading in her great, dark eyes.

"Will you permit me to look at your right hand?" Billy gently asked, stepping to the bedside.

The young woman drew it out from under the coverlet, laying it upon the top of the snowy spread, where its shapely form was splendidly outlined.

Billy saw at a glance that it was the very counterpart of the severed hand in the possession of the superintendent of police. He had almost hoped to see a hand with which the other would not match, since seeing this girl.

With a quick movement he took a rule from his pocket, and in a moment had taken the width and length of the hand, taking the length from the exact place where the left hand had been severed.

"Have you found the missing hand, sir?" the keen-eyed lawyer quickly asked.

"Why do you ask?" queried Billy, though he knew well enough.

"What other reason could you have for taking the measure of the lady's hand? And, you have taken it from the very point where the left hand was severed, sir."

"You have made a shrewd guess," Billy acknowledged. "A hand has been found, and my reason for taking the measure of the lady's right hand was to compare it with the other."

The young woman raised her hand, and for a moment covered her eyes.

When she removed it, her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"You will give me my lost hand, will you not, sir?" she asked.

"It is not in my possession, Miss Donaldson," Billy answered. "It will surely be restored to you, however, I think I can safely promise."

"Of course it will, and that without much delay," spoke up the lawyer. "That will be attended to, Julia, so do not trouble yourself about it further. I will see to that."

"You will now permit me to see the injured arm?" Billy even more gently asked.

The mother stepped forward, and carefully drawing down the covers, displayed the banded stump as it lay across the girl's body.

One glance was enough. There was no decep-

tion there. The hand had been severed at the wrist.

Billy drew back immediately, as soon as satisfied, motioning that the covers be replaced. As the lawyer had assured him, he had beheld a sad sight.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the lawyer.

"Perfectly, so far," answered Billy.

"And does the other hand compare with this?"

"I does, so closely that I feel sure it belonged to this lady."

"Thank you, sir. That is good. I see you are an honorable fellow. Our case is won, Mrs. Donaldson."

"You will now permit me to ask a few questions?" Billy inquired.

He addressed the young woman.

"If you must, sir."

"It is necessary. Will you tell me whether you removed your ring before the accident, please?"

The girl gave a start.

"How do you know I had worn a ring?" she demanded.

"You have answered my question by the one you ask," Billy rejoined. "I know you did remove the ring yourself, or some one for you. The mark of a ring is on the severed hand; that is the way we know its owner had worn one."

"You are a keen questioner, young man," spoke up the lawyer. "Let me put a question to you. How do you know the lady removed the ring herself, or some one for her?"

"There is no need to answer your first question, sir," answered Billy. "You, a lawyer, must know that the lady's answer to my question was an admission that she had worn a ring, as well as that she knew it was not on her missing hand. She asked how I knew she had worn a ring."

"Well, my second question, then."

"I prefer to withhold my explanation of that, for the present," Billy returned. And then to the young lady:

"Have you that ring in your possession?"

"I have not, sir; I lost it."

"Why did you remove it?"

"It was tight and hurt my finger."

"Will you describe the ring to me, please?"

"It was a heavy seal, with an uncut black onyx in the form of an ellipse set in the top. Billy made careful note of the description.

"Why do you ask a description of that ring?" asked the lawyer.

"So that I may know it if I see it," Billy answered. "Some of your questions seem idle, sir, you being a lawyer. The lady has just said she lost the ring."

"My questions seem idle, do they, young man?" the lawyer rejoined sharply. "I am best judge of their import, I think. That ring can have nothing to do with the case you are here to make out."

"Allow me to be the best judge of that, sir, with due respect to you," was the young detective's return.

"Where had you been that night, Miss Donaldson?" he immediately followed up with another question. "Where did you board the incoming Express?"

The young woman appeared confused, and hesitated.

"You called my questions idle, young man," the lawyer sharply interposed; "I want to know what you call that one? What further proof do you want? having found the missing hand at the scene of the accident."

"The hand in our possession was not found at the scene of the accident—the railroad accident," Billy corrected. "I have not said that it was found there. I must have an answer to my question."

"Not found at the scene of the accident?" and the lawyer looked the amazement he felt, while the young woman's expression was one of confusion and alarm.

"I—I cannot tell you where I was that night," the young woman replied, falteringly. "Oh, mamma, why did you let him come here? Why were you in such haste to begin this suit for damage?"

"Tut, tut!" chided the lawyer, himself not a little irritated at this sudden turn. "Of course you can tell where you were that night: you must tell. You admitted to me that you had been out to Haddonfield, and missing the late local, sprung aboard the Express which came along soon after and slowed up at the station for some reason or other."

It was out; the lawyer, in his desire to repair whatever damage the young lady had done to her case, telling what he knew.

"That is all right, and reasonable enough, I

am sure," asserted Billy, promptly. "On what train did you go to Haddonfield, Miss Donaldson?"

"The—the five-thirty, I think it was, sir."

"You bought a ticket, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you bought one to return?"

"What matters that point?" put in the lawyer. "She was on the train, and on the train she lost her hand; that is the point."

"It matters little, but I desire an answer," Billy gently urged.

"I—I was going to pay my fare on the train, but had not yet done so when the accident came," the young woman declared, with apparent frankness.

"Are you done, now, sir?" asked the lawyer, rather petulantly.

"Very nearly, sir. Mrs. Donaldson, at what hour did your daughter reach home that night?"

"It was after twelve, sir."

"And you were anxious about her, of course, expecting her earlier. That would be only natural."

"I was more than anxious, sir, for I did not know where she was. She had gone out without telling me where she was—"

"Oh, mamma, please send him away now!" the young lady interrupted. "I cannot bear the excitement any longer. Leave me alone, please do."

"Certainly," said Billy, promptly. "Let us retire, by all means. I am very sorry for you, Miss Donaldson, and sorry that I have been obliged to trouble you as I have done."

Bowing and retiring toward the door as he spoke, he was ready to leave the room.

Again those great, black eyes were turned upon him, with something of a piteous appeal in their depths, as he thought it to be.

"Yes, this has gone about far enough," observed the lawyer. "Let us retire by all means. I am afraid the doctor will have good cause to scold when he hears of this."

They left the room and descended to the hall below, where Billy paused to ask a few more seemingly idle questions concerning the time and manner of the young woman's coming home.

While they stood there the bell was rung, and the butler announced:

"Mr. Jarred Wyckham, Mrs. Donaldson."

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY'S REPORT.

BROADWAY BILLY had about finished his interview, and etiquette demanded his prompt withdrawal now; but, curiosity to learn something about the person who had just been announced determined his action.

The butler had slipped up slightly in his duty, in making the announcement as he had, but there was some excuse for him. His mistress stood but a few feet from the door, taking leave of the last caller, and could not help but hear the inquiry for herself, and perhaps the butler had acted upon natural impulse in turning and saying who the caller was.

Then, too, a desire to rid the house of the young man who had so bearded him in his den, so to say, might have had something to do with it.

If that was his idea, however, he did not see its success. Billy was between the door and Mrs. Donaldson, and as soon as the name was spoken he stepped quickly aside to let the lady advance, while he made some remark to the lawyer, in low tone, to cover his real design.

Mrs. Donaldson had advanced, the butler opening the door wider, and the lady and the visitor stood face to face.

"I have called to inquire how Miss Donaldson is," the man asked.

"She is doing as well as we can expect, Mr. Wyckham," was the response.

"It is useless for me to inquire if I may see her, of course."

"Quite so, Mr. Wyckham."

Billy noted that the woman's tone and manner were anything but cordial.

"But, you will tell her I have called, I trust," the man remarked.

"If it has not slipped my mind when I return to her," was the chilling answer, and the interview was closed.

"Thank you," said the man, with irony, and lifting his hat he departed without delay.

Billy stepped forward before the door closed, and with a polite good-day to the lady and the lawyer together, and a still more polite good-day to the butler, left the house.

The man Wyckham had gained only a few paces the start, and Billy went after him.

He had noted that the man was young, not over thirty, and good-looking.

Billy made his pace just a little faster than his, and when he overtook him, offered the remark:

"I was just leaving the house when you made inquiries for the injured young woman, sir. The information you got was not very satisfying, I can imagine. As I have just seen the young lady I am willing to give you the benefit of my knowledge."

"You are a stranger to me, but I shall be grateful to you if you will tell me just how you found her."

"Well, her life is in no danger, I should imagine. She has lost her left hand, and the shock was no doubt great, but there is no reason why she should not pull through all right."

"Thank you. May I inquire who you are?"

"My name is Washingham. I called to investigate the case in the interest of the railroad company."

"Oh, I see. I was wondering how you ever gained admission, when everybody else has been refused. In my case, though, it has been no more than I expected."

"I noted that you were rather coldly received."

"Freezingly, you might well say. But, perhaps things will be different now, since Miss Donaldson has been maimed for life. But, pardon me, I almost forgot it is a stranger to whom I am speaking."

"No matter about that," said Billy, in his most friendly manner. "I feel as though I know you well, for my sympathies were on your side the moment I took notice how you were received there. I might give a guess that would come pretty near to what you came near disclosing."

"You are welcome to speak your thought, sir."

"Well, to be frank, I take it that you are a lover, with a rival whom the mother favors to your harm."

"By Harry! you have hit it pat. That is just the situation, my friend, and my rival is Clyde Rosedale, a fellow whose fortune overtops mine by quite a pile."

"Rosedale? Rosedale?" Billy repeated. "Is not that the name I have heard in connection with the mysterious murder that happened the other night?"

"You mean old Haldemyer's murder?"

"That's it. That's the name."

"Yes, that is the name, and it is the same Clyde Rosedale. He is the old man's nephew and heir. Mrs. Donaldson brought about an engagement between him and her daughter before he went away."

"He is away, then?"

"Yes; has been some weeks in St. Louis."

"His rise in fortune will bring him home, no doubt."

"No doubt he is here now, or very near home. I wish he were further, confound him!"

"Naturally under the circumstances. Well, Mr. Wyckham, I may have occasion to call at the house again, and if I do it will give me pleasure to inform you how the young lady is, if you will give me your address."

"I'll be glad if you will do so. Here is my card."

As he spoke the young man took an address card from his pocket and handed it to the young detective.

"I don't see how I came to make a confidant of you on such very brief acquaintance," he added, "but I suppose it is because I like your face."

"Glad to know I have a face of that kind," Billy responded, cheerfully. "Well, here I must be going another way, Mr. Wyckham, so will bid you good-day. Probably you will hear from me."

"Good-day, Mr. Washingham."

So they parted, and Billy lost no time in presenting himself at Headquarters.

"Ha! successful, eh?" the superintendent greeted him the moment he entered. "I am glad I was not disappointed in you. Do not open your lips, though, till I call the inspector. I want him to hear your report. Not a word, I say, Billy."

The superintendent sent immediately for the inspector, and when he entered, said to him:

"Well, here is our man, and I have not allowed him to speak a word yet, as I promised. Now, Billy, let's hear from you."

"Well, I got there," Billy briefly announced.

"Do you mean to say you got into that house and saw the girl?" the inspector demanded.

"Nothing less," Billy quietly assured. "I have seen her and have had an interview with her and her mother."

The superintendent lay back in his chair and laughed.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Nothing can shake my confidence in Broadway Billy now."

"But, how in the name of wonders did you do it?" the inspector urged. "How did you ever get past that statue at the door?"

"I took advantage of him by stepping into the hall the moment the door was opened, sir, and then I talked him down, though we came near having a scrap right there."

"Well, I'm amazed at you, that's all. It's your cheek that carries you along, that's what it is."

"They tell me it's hard and polished, that's so," Billy agreed.

"Well, what did you learn?" asked the superintendent. "Did you get a sight of the girl's hand?"

"I not only saw it, sir, but measured it. It is the mate to the hand you have here, as sure as fate. Have you measured this one?"

They had, and when the figures were compared they were found to be exact.

"And what did she have to say?" asked the superintendent.

Thereupon Broadway Billy told his story at length, and it was listened to with rapt attention.

After he concluded there was silence for several moments.

"What do you think?" the inspector asked, at last, addressing the superintendent.

"I'll tell you what," was the slowly spoken response. "In spite of all appearances against her I am inclined to believe that girl is innocent."

"You are?"

"I am."

"Why, there is almost evidence enough to hang her."

"I can't help it. There are a number of little points which speak in her favor, and I'm going to think her innocent until I am forced to believe otherwise."

"I hope you are right, sir," said Billy, "for I like her face."

"And I like what you have said of her, though I have never seen the girl. I suppose you have told us everything?"

"You have had every particular, sir."

"Good. You have done better than well, Billy Weston, and I thank you. Go right ahead with the case, now, and do the best you can to solve the riddle."

"Do you want me to go it alone, or act under your directions?"

"Go it alone. Make it a special. I have my own men to carry out my ideas, and I am sure you have some thoughts of your own to work out. Yes, go it alone."

"And see that you don't beat the whole force," cautioned the inspector.

"Little fear of that, I guess," Billy laughed.

"You have made a good beginning, anyhow. You got into that house, after so many others had failed."

"That was more by luck than through ability, sir. But, it is all one to me, so long as I got there just the same. Well, that being all I can tell you, I will amble," and Billy left the office.

"Well, what do you think of him now?" asked the superintendent.

"I'll bet he will sit in my chair and yours, before he closes his career."

"It would not surprise me any, but that won't be till we are done with them ourselves. He is the best detective in the world, of his years, that is certain."

"I agree with you, now, yet I do hope he will not come out ahead in this matter, for it would give him too exalted an opinion of himself, I am afraid. But, he has a hard task ahead of him if he does."

"It would not surprise me to see him win. We must not sit by and wait for that to happen, however, but must push the case all we can, now that we have got so much of a start. We have the work now of proving the innocence of that young girl."

"Or her guilt?"

"Yes, or her guilt."

"I have got to cover Haddonfield, now, I suppose."

"Yes. We must know why the girl went there, whom she went to see, and all about it."

"All provided she was there at all. I'll make it my business to be sure on that point first, if it is possible. I consider the mystery deeper than it was before we got Broadway Billy's report."

"The thread is more tangled, if possible, I admit."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUSPECTED NEPHEW.

THE through train from the West rolled into the Broad Street Station, Philadelphia, a few minutes late.

It had been later, but some of the time had been made up, and the train came in with a speed and roar that for a moment seemed to threaten destruction to everything.

The iron steed was under a controlling hand, however, and gradually the speed was reduced and finally the engine stopped, panting, and the passengers began to pour out from the cars with the usual hurry and bustle.

At the gates stood a man who eagerly searched the line of passengers as it drew near, as if looking for some friend or acquaintance.

He was a man of forty or so, a stout fellow of medium size, with eyes as keen as the eyes of a hawk.

Not a person in the line escaped his scrutiny, and when the last had passed he stepped forward to enter the gate, but the gateman detained him.

"Business, sir," the stranger said, briefly, and at the same time he displayed a detective's badge.

"All right, sir; go on!" was the permission promptly given.

He went at once to the cars just arrived, and getting upon the steps of the first of the Pullman cars, entered and passed through.

Keenly his eyes fell upon each face in turn, as he passed, and so it was with the next car, and the next.

When about half way through the third car, an ordinary coach of the line, he ceased his close scrutiny of faces, and going on through the car got off.

"Well, he came with the train, that is sure," he said to himself. "It is a big point in his favor."

He loitered around while the train was made up for its further journey, and did not board it till it started upon its last stretch to Jersey City.

A goodly number of passengers had entered the cars meanwhile, and when he went into the car where he had discovered his man, all the seats were taken, and he had to stand.

But, this seemed to be what he had figured on.

At Trenton some of the passengers got out, and the detective hastening forward, spoke to one of the passengers beside whom a seat had been vacant.

"S at engaged, sir?" he asked.

"No, sir," the reply.

The detective sat down, making some passing remark upon a crowded car.

"Yes, quite crowded, that's true," his companion made return. "Travel seems to be good."

"Have you come from the West, sir?"

"St. Louis."

"I beg your pardon for hinting at such a thing, sir, but seems to me I have seen your face before."

At this the passenger from St. Louis turned and favored the man with a steady look.

"I don't think I have ever met you," he answered.

"Then I'm mistaken, of course. I have a good memory for faces, though."

"Well, to test it, where do you think you have seen me?"

"It was in New York, if anywhere, for there's where I live."

"It is possible you have seen me there."

"Ever been at the — Club?"

"I have the honor to be a member, sir. My home is in New York."

"Ha! then I am sure of my ground. It was there I saw you, and now I think I can tell you the occasion."

"Do so."

"The night Robsley was elected president, and the club had a little blowout. I think it was last January, some time. You made a brief speech."

"You have hit it right, I have no doubt. But, are you a member of that club yourself?"

"No; I was there as a reporter."

"Ha! a reporter, eh?"

"I was at that time. I am in the insurance line now, and like it better. My name is Green."

"Ha, ha! Your name fits closely to what I first took you to be."

"What was that?"

"A green-goods man. I thought you were trying to bunco me for a flat from the Western wilds."

"Well, that's too good, that is. I must tell my wife about that, when I get home, and let her help me enjoy a laugh. Ha, ha, ha!"

The detective laughed quite heartily then and there, as though he meant to cheat his wife out of the first installment of it, anyhow. And, the other joined him, at his expense.

"Let me see; I have forgotten your name, though I think I heard it that night, sir," the detective presently observed.

"My name is Rosedale, sir."

"That's it; now I recall it fast enough. Say—yes, that's so, sure enough. You are a nephew to Humphrey Haldemyer!"

"Yes; poor man."

"Then you have heard—"

"That is what brings me home."

"Too bad, was it not?"

"It was terrible. Can you give me any of the particulars?"

"Why, yes, so far as they have been given in the papers. It is all the talk at present."

The detective went ahead and gave his fellow passenger such an account of the mysterious murder as was known to the public generally.

"It is a wonderful case," Rosedale mused when he had done. "It looks as if it would give the police considerable of trouble to learn who that fair robber was. It is a puzzle to me."

"It is a puzzle to everybody, Mr. Rosedale."

"Yes, it must be."

"Can you think of no one upon whom to cast suspicion?"

"Not a soul. Do you know anything about how the assassin got into the house?"

"Oh, yes, that is well known. There is no mystery about that part of it. A wire key was found in the front door."

"Ha! that looks like the work of a professional burglar, does it not?"

"Yes; but, why was a woman with him?"

"You ask me too much."

"The theory advanced by the newspapers is that she knew the combination of the safe, and—"

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"Because, that was known to no one but my uncle himself."

"Are you sure of that? As it appears, it certainly was known to the robbers, somehow."

"I can't imagine how they learned it, for uncle guarded it as he guarded the apple of his eye. He never let even me know it."

"But, then, 'tis said you and he were not on the best of terms."

"Well, that's true, but no one was on any better terms with him, so far as I am aware. Then, there is another point."

"What's that?"

"If the woman knew the combination she must also have known of the knife trap, and would she be fool enough to go and put her hand into it?"

"It does not look reasonable, that is true. But, perhaps her companion knew about it, and allowed her to be the one to suffer. Oh, it is a puzzle, and I'm nothing at detective work."

"Neither am I. I wish I were good at it, I'd try to get at the bottom of this mystery. I'll try it anyhow, for I shall employ a private detective as soon as I get in New York."

"Do you know of one?"

"No; but they are easily found when wanted."

"I suppose so. Anything can be found in New York, if it is in the world."

"Been away from home long?"

"Some weeks."

"Must have been quite a shock to you."

"It was, indeed. I telegraphed and started at once. Sorry I was not at home when it happened."

"Why?"

"I might have been able to capture the knaves."

"And you might have shared your uncle's fate. Then, it's just as well you were absent, maybe."

"How so?"

"Suspicion might have fallen upon you."

"On me? Impossible! No, that would never have happened, surely. That thought is not to be entertained for a moment."

"Perhaps not, but as it is you are safe enough, being so far away from home at the time of the crime. These detectives have little regard where they throw suspicion, I have always understood."

"I suppose not, but only an idiot would suspect me of killing my uncle. What motive could be found for it?"

"Oh, you mustn't ask me that; only a detective could tell you."

"I was his prospective heir."

"But, he always held the money-bags closed pretty tight against you, if rumor has it right."

"That is true; but, what has Dame Rumor

got to do with it? Has my name been mentioned in connection with the case?"

"Oh, yes; your name has been in the papers as the heir to his millions. That is why I made the remark I did. Just as well that you were away."

"No more than was to be expected, when you think of it, that's true. Well, I still say I am sorry I was not at home, for all. It might not have happened had I been there."

"No doubt you will be overrun with reporters the moment you get home."

"Let them come. They are welcome to all the information I can give them, which will be precious little."

"So I can perceive. But, were I in that line still I would go at you hammer and tongs, prying into your uncle's private affairs in a way to curdle your blood."

The detective ended with a laugh, as though he considered he had said a good thing, and at that the talk about the murder mystery was dropped and other matters discussed.

Arriving in New York, the two parted company with a friendly "so-long" to each other, and each went his way; but, where this detective dropped the suspect another took him in hand, and from that moment Clyde Rosedale was a shadowed man.

CHAPTER IX.

BILLY AT WORK.

WHEN he left Headquarters, Broadway Billy returned to his own office.

It was about time to close for the day, and Happy Harry and Silent Seth were awaiting his coming, hoping he would get there before they closed the office.

"Harry and I were anxious to see you before we shut up shop," remarked Seth, after Harry had given vent to an outbreak of welcome too long to quote. "We thought you might have work for us."

"We are about dead, too, with curiosity to know how you made out, 'specially Seth," Harry added. "Do you come back the same as we did, knocked out in the first round by that bully of a butler? or did you put your foot on his neck and squelch him? Seth is in the last stages, so speak quick."

"Well, I got there, boys, but I guess I did not crush the butler to any great extent. Come, though, we'll close and go home, and I'll tell you about it on the way there."

"Just what I thought would happen," cried Harry. "We are no good, Seth, and may as well give it up as a bad job."

"You are as good as you ever were," said Billy. "I don't wonder you didn't get in."

"Then you don't hold us in contempt 'cause we didn't?"

"Not a bit."

The lads put the office in order for the night, and the detective trio set out for home and supper.

On the way there Billy gave them a full understanding of the case, as was his custom to do, and assigned them their parts on the programme.

Harry was to go and give some attention to Jarred Wyckham, while Seth played shadow upon the Donaldson residence for a while.

When they reached home they found Fatty Skinny there to see Billy on business.

It was something concerning their store.

Skinny had grown bigger and fatter than ever, and could now tip the beam at almost double Billy's weight.

Roger Watts and Billy's mother were present, of course, and as Billy looked around he remarked that his whole brigade was on hand for duty.

"And maybe you'll have to call us out, too, my son, before you get done with the case you are on now," the old ex-ranger remarked in a joking way. "How is it going with ye?"

"That's so, urged Fatty-Skinny, "how are you making out, Billy? Seems to me you don't get there like you used to when you had me to boost you along."

"I admit that I lost the brains of the concern when I lost you," Billy declared.

"Then you had better take me back again."

"Too late. Your brains has all gone to fat, now, and you would swamp the combination, sure."

"Which speaks well for the amount of brains I used to have, anyhow," Skinny observed, displaying his ponderous person as he spoke.

"But, the case," urged Roger.

Billy gave them an outline, and when he had finished his business with Fatty-Skinny they had supper.

That duty done, Billy and the boys sallied

forth, the old ex-ranger calling after them that he was ready for duty if needed.

Billy had been studying hard upon the case all the time, and had made up his mind to several things, one of which was that it would be waste of time for him to take up the railroad clew.

He knew the police detectives would attend to that, now that he had given them the information to work upon, and that he could get the result of their investigations by applying to the superintendent on the morrow. So, he decided to leave all that to them.

In setting Harry and Seth the duties he had, it had been more to pacify and interest them than with any idea that any good would come of it.

He believed Wyckham was out of consideration altogether so far as being guilty of any part in the crime, and he was inclined to agree with the superintendent, too, that Miss Donaldson was innocent.

It will be understood that the funeral of the murdered man had not yet taken place.

That had been put off till the arrival of his nephew from the West, and the body was lying at the late residence.

When he had parted with the boys, Billy went there.

His summons brought the housekeeper, Mrs. Gernsey, to the door, and as he had been there before, she recognized him.

"Has Mr. Rosedale come home yet?" he inquired.

"No, sir; but I look for him now at any minute. Several have been here asking for him."

"Reporters?"

"I suppose so. They have pestered me to death ever since this awful thing happened."

"Well, you know I am not a reporter, Mrs. Gernsey, but one who would give much to be able to solve this awful mystery."

"I only wish you could do it, sir."

"Have you heard the news, Mrs. Gernsey?"

"No; what is it?"

"Of course you have not heard, for it is a secret yet. We have found the person whose hand was found here."

"You don't tell me! Come in, sir, and let me know all about it. If it is a secret you know you can trust me with it, for I would almost give one of my own hands to see justice done."

"Yes, I will come in, Mrs. Gernsey, for I should like to look around before Mr. Rosedale arrives, if possible."

He had been successful in working upon her curiosity, and felt that he would be able to carry out the plan he had in his mind.

Besides, he wanted to make another careful study of the room where the crime had been done.

The housekeeper was not alone in the house.

There were two other servants besides herself, and now several relations of the dead man were there.

She led the way to her own little sitting-room at the rear of the library, where she could have the young detective all to herself, feeling perhaps, that she could "pump" him at leisure.

"Now, do tell me," she urged, "whose hand it was."

"You will keep it a profound secret, Mrs. Gernsey?"

"Yes, yes, I swear I will, sir."

"And you won't tell any one but Mr. Rosedale!"

"I won't even tell him, if you say—"

"But, I want you to tell him."

"I will do just what you require, and no more. But, do tell me, for I am dying to know."

"Do you know Miss Julia Donaldson, Mrs. Gernsey?"

"Certainly I do, sir; she is engaged to Mr. Rosedale. She has been here a few times."

"You would not think the hand could be hers, would you?"

"Julia Donaldson's hand! What are you talking about? But, I can see you are only joking, now."

"I am not joking, Mrs. Gernsey. On the night of the murder Miss Donaldson had her left hand severed at the wrist, and she is now in bed and under the doctor's care in consequence."

"Merciful heavens!"

The woman had turned white, she had grasped the arms of her chair, had partly risen, and stared at the young detective as though she thought him crazy or she herself about to become so.

Billy waited for her to speak.

"You certainly can not be in earnest," she presently said.

"I have spoken the truth," Billy confirmed.

"Julia Donaldson's hand cut off?"

"Such is the fact."

"And it was her hand that was found here?"

"It was."

"Oh, it can't be; there is a mistake somewhere, sir."

"But, we are sure of it, Mrs. Gernsey. Anyhow, it is a positive fact that the young woman's left hand is gone."

"Why, sir, she knew all about the knife, for Mr. Haldemyer showed it to her and her mother once when they were here; and to think that she would come here and put her hand in it—"

Billy had gained a point.

Miss Donaldson had known about the trap, and it was folly to think she could have been induced to put her hand in it.

Here, he believed, was proof of her innocence; to say nothing about the improbability of her having entered the house like a burglar—as a burglar in fact, or as the accomplice of one.

Still, the stubborn facts were yet to be explained away.

The housekeeper had broken off abruptly for loss of words to carry out what she wanted to express.

"Nevertheless, she did do it, it seems," Billy urged, "for here was her hand, and her blood was spattered all around, as you know."

"I can't believe it, sir, I can't believe it, unless—"

She stopped short.

"Unless what, Mrs. Gernsey?"

"I had a thought, but it does not matter, for it is foolish to think that lady could or would have come here as a robber."

"What was the thought?"

"Why, I was going to say it was impossible, unless she had watched Mr. Haldemyer as he set the knife and unset it again, and thought she could do it."

Billy felt as though some one had struck him a blow.

Was this the truth of it? Was this the very explanation of the mystery?

"But, Mrs. Gernsey," he disputed, "how could she know the combination, even if she could avoid the knife?"

"That is it, sir. No one knew that but Mr. Haldemyer himself."

"No one at all?"

"No one."

"Yet, it has been shown plainly enough that some one did know it. Now, was any opportunity given Miss Donaldson to learn it?"

"None whatever, sir, so far as I know. No, it is useless to think of that. I know Mr. Haldemyer would not have told an own son or daughter, if he had such. It was not his way, sir."

CHAPTER X.

ROSEDALE'S HOME-COMING.

BROADWAY BILLY was silent for a moment, and during that moment there came a summons at the door.

Mrs. Gernsey rose to answer it.

"One moment," Billy interposed.

"What is it, sir?"

"If it is Mr. Rosedale, bring him in here before you tell him. If any one else, do not take him to the library."

"I understand, sir."

She left the room, and Billy waited.

"This is a puzzling matter," he said to himself. "The further I get into it the less light I can see ahead. Wonder how it will come out, anyhow? Well, I'm going to play hard."

After a few minutes' absence the housekeeper returned, alone.

"It is a man to see Mr. Rosedale," she announced. "I showed him into the parlor."

"Where is the body lying, Mrs. Gernsey?"

"In the library, sir."

"Very well. I want to take one more careful look around that room before Mr. Rosedale gets here, and if you will show me in I will go there now. When I get ready to leave the house I will withdraw quietly."

"Very well, sir; but, I did want to talk with you further. You have excited all my curiosity to know more about the accident to Miss Donaldson. I am sure it was not her hand that was found here, in spite of all appearances. Don't you see yourself it could not be?"

"It would be useless for us to discuss the matter, Mrs. Gernsey, since we do not know any more about it than we do. After awhile all will be made plainer, no doubt, and then we shall be able to understand."

"But, sir—"

"Pardon me, but my time is short. When I come again we will have a longer talk about it.

Now, just a word of caution to you, Mrs. Gernsey."

"What is it, sir?"

"I shall probably be gone when Mr. Rosedale arrives. I would not let on to him about Miss Donaldson till after that stranger has gone away, whoever he is. Then he will want you to tell him all about it, and you can tell him everything."

"Yes, sir."

"If you find the light turned down in the library, you will know I have gone."

"Yes, turn it down when you go. But, I shall probably hear you when you shut the door, even if I do not see you before you go."

That was all that was said, and she conducted him from the sitting-room and let him into the library.

In the center of the floor, where the big reading-table had stood, was now the coffin bearing the remains of the murdered man, covered with a heavy pall.

A single light burned dimly.

The housekeeper closed the door, leaving Billy alone in the gruesome room, and he turned up the light.

The safe was now closed, the knife-trap hanging idly by the lock. The floor had been covered to hide the ugly stains that had been left on the carpet.

Billy went forward and examined that hideous knife-trap with interest, as he had already done before. It was an ingenious affair, so arranged that when set it was not readily noticed.

The police had given orders that it should not be cleaned of the blood that was on it till they gave permission, so it was still the same as it had been on the morning of the discovery of the crime, as nearly as possible, and Broadway Billy examined it with renewed interest.

"A mighty ugly thing to have around the house, even if it was to protect his fortune," he said to himself. "Even a burglar is human, and ought to be given a fair chance. This is what I call a mean trick to play on the worst burglar out of jail, or in jail either, for that matter. Still, he made no secret of it, and I suppose it was all right."

He was still examining the blades of the trap with extreme care.

The blood had dried upon them and between them, and it did not appear that they had been opened since they closed with such deadly effect on that fatal night.

Taking hold of the back of each blade, he pulled them apart, though it required quite an effort to do so, and looked at the stain that had lain between them, now hard and apparently rusted.

As he looked closely, a half exclamation escaped him.

"Here is a clue at last," he said to himself. "I must make sure of it before I am interrupted."

Allowing the knives to close once more, he felt in his pockets for something with which to hold them open a little, and drew forth his small pocket rule.

Holding this in his teeth, he opened the blades once more, and inserting the end of the rule, held them in that position. Taking then his knife, and holding an envelope, he scraped some of the hardened blood from the trap blades.

It was soon done, and he put his find carefully away in his pocket and removed his rule from the trap.

"Good," he said to himself. "The superintendent will agree with me, I know."

Turning down the light, he stepped to the door, and opening it cautiously, looked out.

No one was in sight.

Leaving the door just ajar, he passed to the front door, which he opened and closed again immediately with noise enough to be heard plainly.

No sooner done than he sprung noiselessly back to the library, entered, and softly closed the door, crossing at once to the other side and taking his place behind a heavy curtain where a window was closed in by the adjoining house.

There he remained, silent.

In a few moments the door opened, and through a hole in the curtain which he had made with his pencil he saw Mrs. Gernsey.

"Yes, he's gone," he heard her say to herself. "I thought I should hear him when he went. Little good it has done him to come here, I fancy, though he is a bright young man."

She entered and walked around the room, seeing that he had left everything in order, and retired.

Some time passed.

Finally the front door was heard to close sharply, and in a moment voices were heard in the hall. Then the door of the library opened.

The housekeeper entered, followed by a good-looking young man who carried a heavy grip in his hand, which he set down just within the door and advanced and turned up the gas.

Billy knew who it was.

"Poor uncle!" the young man exclaimed. "Lift this thing, will you, Mrs. Gernsey."

The housekeeper lifted the pall, and the young man looked at the features of the dead man long and sorrowfully.

"Poor uncle!" he repeated. "What have they done, Mrs. Gernsey, toward finding out who killed him?"

"Very little, I am afraid, Master Clyde," was the reply. "I have something terrible to tell you, though, after awhile."

"You cannot tell me anything more terrible than this, so out with it."

"No, no, not yet. There is a man in the parlor waiting to see you, and you had better see him first. I will tell you after he has gone away."

"Well, bring him in here."

The woman stepped out, soon returning with a man whom Billy recognized as one of the Headquarters men in a slight disguise.

"Mr. Clyde Rosedale?" he interrogated.

"Yes, sir," was the response. "What do you want, sir?"

"I am a reporter on the *Daily Moon*, sir, and would like to have your opinion of this terrible affair."

"You are welcome to it. A most dastardly crime has been done here, and no stone shall be left unturned in trying to bring the guilty wretch to justice."

"Have you suspicion against any one?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any idea to whom that missing hand can have belonged?"

"Not the slightest."

"Can you say anything that will throw light upon the matter in any way? The public are at fever heat to see the mystery solved."

"I am wholly at loss, sir, in every direction. I only regret that I was not at home when it happened, for then, even if I could not have prevented it, I might have done something toward arresting the assassin."

"Thank you, sir. When I heard the door close I thought it was some one going out, or I would have met you in the hall. I did not hear you ring."

"I let myself in with my key, which I had with me."

"Ah! I see. Good-evening, sir."

"Good-evening."

The detective went out and left the house, and Broadway Billy had the benefit of all that he could report to his superior.

"Now, Mrs. Gernsey," Rosedale immediately asked, "what is there you have not told me? But, then, you have not told me anything, so sit down and give me the whole story of this crime."

They sat down, and the housekeeper told the story of the crime in full, the young man listening attentively to the end.

"Is that all?" he asked, as she stopped, finally.

"No, it is not all," said she, "for the worst is now to be told. They have discovered the woman who lost her hand here."

Broadway Billy thought he saw the young man's face turn slightly more pale than it had been.

"Who is the person?" he asked. "When did they discover her?"

"I don't know when, and it was told to me as a secret, for they did not want it to get out yet. I am to tell you only on condition that you keep it for the—"

"Tell me, tell me at once," the young man interrupted, impatiently.

"It will be a shock to you, as it was to me, so be—"

"Never mind, tell me this moment."

There was no doubt in his paleness now.

"The woman who lost her hand here was Julia Donaldson—"

"My God!"

Clyde Rosedale sprung to his feet, wildly, his face now the hue of death, and he pressed one hand to his forehead.

"You do not—you cannot mean it!" he cried. "Julia Donaldson, my promised wife! Her hand! Great heavens, what fatality is there here? What does it mean?"

CHAPTER XI.

BEATING THE BRUSH.

BROADWAY BILLY was keenly interested. He was in a position to hear and see plainly all that was said and done.

The young man paced the floor for a few moments in an excited manner, and then stopped before the housekeeper.

"Who told you this?" he demanded.

"A young detective who has been here to-night."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know his name. He had a badge, and the policemen respect him."

"What did he tell you?"

"No more than that; that Julia Donaldson had lost her hand, and that it was her hand that was found here."

"And he wanted you to keep it to yourself?"

"I was to tell only you, sir."

The young man paced the floor again, with nervous strides.

"It is impossible to believe," he said, as though speaking to himself. "I do not believe it. Julia here to rob my uncle—Pshaw! it is nonsense. You saw the hand, Mrs. Gernsey, of course."

"Ugh! I can see it now, sir."

"Was it like hers?"

"Yes, yes."

"My God! it is horrible to think of! I must go and see her at once, and make sure it is a mistake. It surely must be a false report."

"But, your stepper, Master Clyde—"

"Do you think I could eat now, Mrs. Gernsey? Put it back till I return. You cannot understand how this report has overcome me. I may be able to take a sip of tea when I get back."

"I only hope you will find the report false, but—"

"If I do not, I shall go mad. My love, my beautiful! To think of her having lost one of her hands!"

He turned abruptly and left the room and the house.

"The poor boy, the poor boy!" the housekeeper sighed. "How terrible it will be for him if it is true."

She stood with her hands clasped before her, and bent her eyes to the floor in a thoughtful manner.

"Would that I could solve this terrible mystery," she said to herself. "That I could only know who did kill the poor old man."

For some moments she remained thus, and then with a sigh she unclasped her hands, turned and lowered the light as it had been, and left the room.

"Well, I guess we may as well give up suspicions against Rosedale," the hiding detective said to himself, as he emerged from behind the curtain. "He is cut up about as badly as any fellow I ever saw."

Making sure the hall was clear, he left the room and the house as silently as possible, unseen.

The young man was out of sight, so Billy took the shortest way to the Donaldson residence.

He made haste, and when he came opposite to the house, stopped where a youth was idly standing in the shadows.

"Well, you are here, I find, Seth," he greeted.

"Yes," was the response.

"Anything worth reporting?"

"Nothing, so far."

"Has a young man gone into the house recently?"

"No one at all."

"Then I am here ahead of him."

"Whom?"

"Young Rosedale."

Just then a man was seen coming down the street on the opposite side, and on reaching the shadowed house he sprung up the steps and rung the bell.

"That's he," said Billy.

The door was soon opened, the giant butler appearing.

The watchers could not hear what was said, but after a few moments of parley the caller was admitted.

About the same time a man came loitering along down the street on the same side Billy and his apprentice were on, and stopped a few paces away from them.

"There is his shadow," Billy whispered to Seth. "Come, we have no further business here, so we'll find Harry and go home. The business is done for to-day, I guess."

They took their departure at once, leaving the field to the other.

Billy acted as conductor, talking as they went along, and in due time they came to the abode Jarred Wyckham.

"It was a respectable house on a respectable street, just such a place as Billy had imagined the home of Mr. Wyckham to be, but Happy Harry was nowhere to be seen."

"Something has turned up to draw him away, Seth," Billy said.

"Wyckham must have gone out," the Silent Shadower observed.

"Yes, or has had a visitor whom Harry thought best to follow."

"What is going to be done?"

"I hardly know, unless we go home and leave Harry to come when he finishes his work."

"Suppose I wait here for him: for, if he is shadowing Wyckham, he will come back here sooner or later."

"Well, do so, and when he comes tell him to give up for to-night, unless he has something important and worth following. You and he can judge of that."

"All right."

"I will go back to the Donaldson house and have a word with that detective, if he is still there."

So they parted.

Both Harry and Seth had a description of Wyckham, so they would know him at sight, of course.

Broadway Billy retraced his steps to the house he had seen Clyde Rosedale enter, and the detective was still watching for his man to appear.

"He is there yet, eh?" Billy said, stopping by him.

"Hello!" the detective exclaimed, after a quick, sharp look at his questioner. "Yes, he is there yet, Weston."

"Where did you take up the trail?"

"At the ferry, where it was dropped by the other fellow."

"Anything worthy of note yet?"

"Everything favorable for him, so far."

"So I think, too."

"What have you been doing?"

"I was at the house when he came home, and heard and saw what his words and actions were."

"The deuce you were. You got the inside track of us there, then. He went straight home from the ferry, made a short stay, and came here. Now I can understand it all."

"You guessed he had heard there about the accident to Miss Donaldson."

"Yes, and visions of a plot in which the housekeeper and the young lady were concerned filled my mind, for I wondered how the housekeeper had heard about her lost hand, since it has not been in the papers."

"I told her."

"I see it now. How did Rosedale take it?"

"Hard. It took all the starch out of him for a moment, and he would not wait to eat a mouthful, but came right here."

"No use suspecting him, I think."

"That is the way it looks; and, the mystery is the deeper."

"There he comes."

The young man was just leaving the house.

"Will you come along with me?" asked the Metropolitan detective, of Billy.

"If you think I won't be in your way I'll walk back with you, for it is early in the evening."

Allowing their suspect to get a start, they followed him.

"Do you think it really is Miss Donaldson's hand that was found there?" the police detective asked.

"There is every reason to think so," answered Billy, "and yet there is some ground for doubt. The strongest proof is that she lost her hand on that same night."

"Even though she claims it was lost elsewhere."

"Yes. And, she had worn a ring."

"And her right hand is a perfect mate to the severed hand."

"Couldn't be matched better."

"That was a clever stroke of yours, getting that interview with her."

"My usual luck. I am sorry now that I did not tell her right out where her hand was found, and see how she would take it."

"I think you missed it in not doing so. But, then, that lawyer would have been all ears, and the deuce would have been to pay at once."

"If he had had more of ears and less of eyes and tongue I would have liked him better," Billy observed.

"Pretty sharp, eh?"

"Yes. But, I'll have to scrape acquaintance with him after this case is done and let him know who Washington was."

"It will be a good joke on him."

So they talked on, and finally came to the Haldemeyer residence, where the young man let himself in with a pass-key.

"There is another point in his favor," the police detective remarked.

"It may be taken for or against, either," said Billy.

"How?"

"Well, supposing him to be the guilty person, that wire key he left in the lock would be likely to throw suspicion away from him. It must be well enough known that he has a latch-key."

"Yes, and supposing him innocent that wire key might be used against him to fasten suspicion upon him, for, as you hint, he would hardly be likely to use his pass-key, coming on such an errand. But, then, I think it is waste of time to be shadowing him."

"I think the superintendent will agree in that, when we report to him."

"Where are your boys this time?"

"They are not in it, though they are anxious enough to be doing something. I know how they feel, for I have been there."

"Well, they played a leading role in that case of yours, and they ought to be satisfied with that. You have a good team there, Weston, as everybody admits."

"Yes, they are good ones, that's the fact. Well, I'll leave you, before I do something to give you away."

They parted at that, and Billy went home, where he anxiously awaited the coming of his tireless young beagles, eager to learn what Happy Harry had been doing.

CHAPTER XII.

HAPPY HARRY'S REPORT.

OWING to the death of a relation, Silent Seth, as well as Happy Harry, was now a member of Billy's mother's household.

Billy had suggested their taking rooms by themselves, he and his team, and so make the household smaller and lighter; but his mother would not hear of it, nor would the old ex-ranger, now his father-step-father.

So, here the detective trio would meet as soon as the boys had finished whatever work they were doing.

The hour was growing late when they came in.

"Hello!" Harry greeted, "glad you are here, boss, for I want to unload just as soon as possible."

"What is it?" Billy eagerly inquired.

"I don't know, unless I have seen the murderer."

"What?"

"But, then, I'm batty, you know, and there's no telling whether I'm right or wrong. I think the sooner I get back to polishing leather, the better—"

"Hold on right there, Harry, this is no time to talk wild. Tell me just what has taken place."

"Well, you sent me to watch Wyckham."

"Yes."

"And I did. I made sure he was home, and I put my awful eye on the house and kept it there as tight as though it was glued there. Nothing happened. After a good while a boy with a note in his hand came along and rung the bell. He handed the note to the girl at the door and skinned. I thought at first I'd follow him, but didn't see the sense in that, since I didn't know who the note was for."

"That was right."

"Well, I waited, and pretty soon out came my man, and away he went, and then I lifted my trotters and ambled after him, keeping him well in sight, and he led me straight to the Grand Central Depot."

"Then he has left the city?"

"Nixey. He is back home again, and I'm here."

"Well, well, go on."

"Christopher Columbia! I would'a' been clear past the next mile-post now, if you hadn't chipped in. No, he didn't go away, but he went there to meet a fellow, a poor, seedy, hungry-looking chap; and, he paid him some money."

"Ha!"

"That I said, boss, just like the detectives in the stories say it when they break their necks over a clue and can't help seeing it. This seedy fellow, he did not seem to care to make friends with too much light, but kept in the dark places, and so I had a good chance to get near enough to hear some words, but couldn't get all they said."

"Too bad."

"You bet it was, and I was cuttin' my throat all the time 'cause it was so, but it wasn't to be helped so I had to make the best of it."

"Well?"

"Pretty well, thank you."

"Come, come, Harry, I thought you were in such haste to unload."

"Then don't be bothering me with que—"

about my health when I've got my mind on other things. I heard the tramp fellow say Haddonfield, and Wyckham looked surprised. Then they talked low, and Wyckham pretty soon gave him some money. I don't know how much it was, nor what it was for, but I know it was the good green. Then they talked low some more, and Wyckham made motions with his finger on his wrist, as if to show the other fellow just where the girl's hand had been cut off."

Billy puckered his lips for a whistle.

"Yes, sir, fack," Harry declared. "The other feller looked troubled, and as if he didn't like to hear it. He sort o' lifted his shoulders and shivered. And then about that time the man at the gates called out trains, and Haddonfield was one of the stations he mentioned, and the tramp fellow got himself ready to go."

"You will let me know?" I heard him say.

"Yes, sure," said Wyckham.

"And with that they parted, and the seedy fellow went through the gate and out to the train, and I was just going to amble to the office and buy a ticket for Haddonfield, when a cop grabbed me by the collar, and yanked me out from behind the doorpost, and wanted to know what I was skulking there for; and, therefore I got left. See? Before I got done with him the train had gone."

"What did you do then?"

"I looked around for Wyckham."

"What then?"

"He was there, and when he left followed him home, and there Seth laid hold of me and said you wanted me to give it up for the night, and here we are."

Billy was thoughtful.

"What do you boys see in this?" he asked, presently.

"I'll tell ye what I see," cried Harry. "I see indications that I was never cut out for a detective."

"Why?"

"Detectives never miss important talk between suspect parties."

"That is the way it is in romance, Harry. I guess you will find it is far different in real practice."

"But, you used to hear folks talk."

"And haven't you? This was one of the impossible cases. If you don't stop looking on the dark side of everything I'll give you a new name. What is your impression of it all, Seth?"

"I see in it some excuse for that girl's visit to Haddonfield that night."

"Didn't I say so, too?" Harry demanded.

"Yes, so you did."

"Why didn't you speak out then, Harry," asked Billy. "You see you are not so slow after all. That is my own impression exactly. The next step for us is to go out to Haddonfield and find this fellow and learn what we can about him. Perhaps I'll let you boys attend to that the first thing in the morning."

"You wouldn't trust us, would you?" asked Harry.

"Yes, and I think I will, too."

So, the next morning, Harry and Seth set out for Haddonfield by the first train, while Billy went to Police Headquarters.

"He found the superintendent and the inspector talking about the case."

"Well, Billy, something to report?" asked the former.

"I have come more particularly to get information," was Billy's answer.

"Well, you shall have it if we can give it."

"Have you followed up that Haddonfield clue?"

"Yes."

"Was she there?"

"We cannot say, yet. There were three tickets sold for that place on the night of the crime, and the conductor remembers that a woman in black, with a veil, got off there. His report shows that he took up the three tickets. He does not remember the men at all."

"There is nothing strange about that, for conductors have an eye to charming widows, and such this conductor took the woman to be. That is all we know about her, in that direction. But, the other train did slow up there that night, and it was possible for a woman to get on. The local train was just ahead, and a slow signal was the reason for it."

"The conductor of that train did not see the woman get on, nor did any one so far as we have been able to learn. He did not get her fare, and she was not seen so far as we can find. The conductor of the first train in from the scene of the accident did not make any tempt to take tickets from the injured ones, who were in one end of one of the cars, and so it

was possible for this woman to reach the city unnoticed, if she did not faint."

"It took a nerve, with one hand cut off," Billy observed.

"Yes; but some women are full of nerve. She did hold up till she got home, but there, as we now know, she went down."

"I see one thing we want to know, now."

"What is it?"

"The clothes this young woman had on that night. They will certainly show the work of the accident, if she was in it."

"Can you see them?"

"I can try."

"Well, take it in hand, since you have been once in the house, and get all the information you can besides."

"I'll do it. By the way, I saw Rosedale come home last night."

"My men shadowed him, too. The impression is that he is innocent of any knowledge of the crime."

"It looks that way. I was hiding in the room where the body lay when he came in, and if actions and words count for anything he certainly is innocent."

"Trust you to be in the right place at the right time."

"When it happens so," added Billy.

"And it has a way of happening so almost every time, when you are concerned. But, what new impressions have you gained?"

"I had made up my mind fully that Miss Donaldson was innocent, sir, but now a doubt has forced its way in again."

"There is a pretty big doubt, I should say," observed the inspector.

"Still," said Billy, "I have something now to put to the test, and as soon as I have done that I will come back and report. I think it will either clear the young woman or make a strong point against her."

"What is it?"

"I had rather not disclose it yet, if you will not urge me, sir."

"Just as you please, Billy. You have the case as a special, and have a perfect freedom to work it your own way."

"The point is this, sir: If my idea is empty, then I will not be laughed at, while if there is something in it it may give me a new grip toward solving the mystery."

"I understand your object."

"What is the hour of the funeral?"

"One o'clock."

"I want to be on hand, if I can get around. It may pay to note all the mourners, you know."

"My men are going to be there for that purpose. Do not let the funeral interfere with your getting another interview with the wounded young lady."

"No, I will not. The butler may, though, and I may not be able to overcome him again. But, I'll try it, anyhow. It is plain that she had a very secret errand at Haddonfield, if she was there."

"Yes, so secret that it made her bear her suffering without a complaint till she reached home, in order not to be seen and recognized. What that errand was will be an important factor in the question of her innocence in the other matter. For, you are aware, it was possible for her to have been on the train, and yet to have lost her hand in tampering with Haldemeyer's safe."

"I have not overlooked that point," said Billy.

CHAPTER XIII.

FURTHER PROGRESS.

FROM Headquarters Broadway Billy proceeded immediately to the office of his friend the chemist, over on Fourth avenue.

The man was a professor, and one whose opinion was worthy of weight in any matter where he gave it as the opinion of an expert. He was not by any means unknown.

Billy found him in.

"Ha! what can I do for you again?" the professor asked.

"I want you to examine some dried blood for me, sir, and tell me whether it is human blood or not."

"The easiest thing in the world, young man."

Billy took from his pocket the paper containing the scrapings he had taken from the knife-trap on the previous evening, and gave it into the professor's hand.

The man of knowledge in his line spread it out before him, and proceeded to examine it with a highly powerful magnifying glass.

"Well, it is not human blood," he presently decided.

"Good!" cried Billy. "Glad to hear it! But, what kind do you call it?"

"I would unhesitatingly pronounce it the blood of a cat. Here is a small bit of skin, I see."

"There's no hairs with it, though, sir."

The professor was silent a moment.

"It was a cat," he finally declared, emphatically. "This piece of skin has been singed, but the roots of hair are plainly to be seen. Look for yourself."

Billy did so, and could not help giving an exclamation as he saw how plainly the microscope revealed it.

"That settles it," he cried. "Now I begin to get a grip, in one direction."

"May I inquire what case this has bearing upon?"

"You'll keep mum?"

"Needless to ask that, Mr. Weston!"

"Pardon me, that's true. Well, this blood came from the knife that was on the safe of the murdered man the other night."

"Possible?"

"Fact."

"Then it changes the whole aspect of the case."

"You bet it does! and it is pretty certain there was no woman there at all! But, mum till I get it worked up. What's your charge?"

"I'll tell you what my charge is, young man."

"Well?"

"The price of your coming around here, some evening after the case has been worked out, and telling me all about it, from beginning to end."

"I'll do it."

"I consider it a big price to charge, but I know you are able to pay."

"And I think it's getting off dirt cheap, sir. You shall have the story if I don't get killed between then and now—or now and then. I do get killed now and then, you know."

So Billy remarked, and so they parted.

The next move of the young detective was to go direct to the residence of the murdered man.

The housekeeper admitted him.

"I must pay another visit to the library," Billy explained.

"You are welcome to do so, sir," was the permission. "Master Clyde has told me to give the officers all the help I possibly can."

"Is he at home this morning?"

"No; he is out just now, sir."

"Well, no matter. Lead the way, please."

The woman led him to the door of the library and opened it.

Billy noticed at once that the coffin had been removed and the table put back in its place.

"Where is the body?" he asked.

"In the parlor, sir. It is a larger room, you know."

Billy stepped to the safe and looked closely at the knife-trap attachment.

"Master Clyde says he is going to have the accursed thing taken off and cast away as soon as the funeral is over, sir," the housekeeper remarked.

"Then has he learned that it was the hand of his promised wife that was found here? That this was the deadly weapon which maimed her for life? I do not blame him for calling it accursed—"

"No, sir; oh, no, sir; he has seen Miss Donaldson and knows she is innocent."

"Is it possible she is, when her hand was found here?"

"He will not believe it is her hand."

"I think he will be convinced on that point. The police do not think there is any room for doubt there."

"But, how came it here? She had her hand cut off in a railroad accident."

"So she says."

"Why, do you not believe it?"

"Has she proved to Mr. Rosedale that she was on the railroad?"

"Well, she has not told him why she was there, but there does not seem to be any doubt about her being in the accident."

Billy's first shot had been a wild one, for he had not expected the woman to admit anything, no matter what of Rosedale's knowledge and suspicion she might know.

He was now convinced that she, at any rate, knew nothing.

"Then it cannot be possible that it was her hand that was found here," Billy remarked.

"The police will have to look further."

"I was sure it could not be hers, sir."

"Well, do you know anything about how this trap is removed from the safe. Mrs. Gernsey?"

"No, sir."

"Have you never seen Mr. Haldemyer have it off?"

"No, sir; but, I think it is bolted through the door, for I have seen the safe open often enough."

Billy looked at her closely.

"Would you know how to spring it if I were to set it?" he asked.

"Lor', no!" she gasped. "I wouldn't go nigh it for a fortune bigger than was ever in the safe."

"Do you know whether the safe is locked?"

"I do not, sir. Master Clyde closed it, and no one goes near it."

"Well, I will try it, in your presence, for I want to remove this trap if I can do it."

At that moment, however, the door opened and closed—the front door, and Mrs. Gernsey, recognizing the step in the hall, said Rosedale was coming.

"Ask him in here," ordered the detective.

The housekeeper started to do so, but before she reached the door it opened and the young master came in.

He looked inquiringly at Billy.

"I am a detective," Billy spoke up at once. "I presume Mrs. Gernsey has mentioned me to you, as I have been here several times."

"Oh, you are Byrnes's special, are you?" was the greeting. "Yes, you have been spoken of. Have you found anything additional? anything that will be likely to lead to the guilty party?"

"Nothing, sir. In fact, the case seems darker than ever. We did think we had a clue when we discovered a young lady who had lost her hand—"

"Miss Donaldson?"

"The same."

"Impossible, for she lost her hand in a railway accident."

"Yes, as we are now aware. We have learned that she went to Haddonfield that night, as she says she did, and of course she could not have been in two places at one and the same time."

"Assuredly not."

Billy imagined the young man seemed relieved at that.

"And that being the case, it cannot have been her hand that was found here. We shall have to look further."

"No, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"It was brought here, I was about to say."

"Oh, that is out of the question. The hand found here was cut off here, that is sure. The blood spattered around is proof of that."

"Yes, that is so. It was only a guess, half in jest, anyhow. Do you know, Mr. Detective, I have an idea that I can offer an explanation of this matter?"

"Can you?"

"I have an idea, that is all."

"I am interested to learn what it is. It may be important."

"In telling you, sir, I have to make known something not altogether to my dead uncle's credit."

"You may hold the very clue to the crime, Mr. Rosedale."

"Anyhow, I will tell you what I mean. My uncle had acquaintances of a certain class, to one of whom this hand may have belonged. Do you understand?"

"Of course."

"May he not have told one of these women something about his safe, if not, indeed, the combination to it? And may she not have induced another acquaintance of hers to come here to try to open it?"

"The argument does not speak well for your uncle's good sense."

"I admit it, but old men are sometimes weak, and my uncle had his weak points. This may have been one."

"Can you give me the name of any of these acquaintances?"

"No, for I never knew any of them; I merely know the fact that he had such acquaintances."

"Well, it was bad for the one who put her hand in this trap, whoever she was," Billy declared. "By the way, is the safe locked, Mr. Rosedale?"

"No, it is only closed, sir. I did not dare to lock it until I had changed the combination, for I would not know how to open it again. I shall attend to that after the funeral."

"I came for the purpose of taking away the trap," announced Billy. "Can you help me to remove it?"

"You came for the trap? What are you going to do with that?"

"We want to photograph it, for one thing."

"Yes, I think we can get it off readily enough, sir. It is bolted through the door, and can be removed from the other side. We'll soon see what can be done."

He threw the door open as he spoke, and the bolts were plainly disclosed. The nuts were easily removed, and in a few moments the Special had the hideous trap in his possession. He had gained another step in advance.

CHAPTER XIV.

PUSHING THE CASE.

"EVERYTHING possible must be done to solve this mystery," Rosedale observed, after Billy had wrapped the knife-trap in a paper the housekeeper had brought.

"And everything possible is being done," Billy assured. "Every clue is being followed up with care."

"You yourself are exclusively on it, are you not?"

"Not quite that; others are pursuing investigations."

"Has any suitable reward been offered?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then I must see to it, after the funeral, that a reward is made known, and one that will stimulate the officers to their best efforts, too."

"I do not believe it would make any difference, for they are doing their best as it is."

"Well, it will do no harm, anyhow, and it is all I am able to do."

"No, it will do nothing to harm the chances."

"What shall you do with that knife-trap when you are done with it?"

"I suppose the superintendent will add it to his museum of curiosities, sir."

"Well, let him. If not, then I mean to destroy it. It was a hideous thing to have around."

"And it has done a hideous piece of work, too."

"Yes, even though the victim deserved it. You will follow up the hint I have given you, I suppose?"

"Certainly, sir. Nothing is slighted. A good deal may grow out of that little knowledge concerning your uncle's life."

"Mind you, it was only a thought."

"Certainly."

Billy soon took his leave, and returned to Headquarters once more.

"Hello! back again, Billy?"

"Yes, sir, back again, and with something solid this time."

"So I imagine, by the looks of the package you have there. What was your object in removing the knife from the safe?"

"How did you know it is the knife?"

"By the shape of the package it makes in that paper."

"Well, you have guessed aright, sir, and I have brought it to you so that you put it in a safe place."

"Has it suddenly grown in value?"

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"Because, *the blood on it is not human blood!*" spoken slowly.

"Ha! now you are getting things down fine, Billy. But, how do you know what you assert?"

"I have had some of it examined."

"By whom?"

Billy informed him.

"That is enough. We have a new clue, now."

"And one which points to the innocence of Miss Donaldson."

"Yes, and the mystery now is, how came her hand there when she lost it elsewhere?"

"There is the possible chance that it was not her hand."

"It is only the ghost of a chance."

"So I admit."

"Well, Mr. Rosedale has advanced a theory."

"Has he, indeed? I shall be interested to hear what it is, Billy."

Billy related what had been hinted, and the story was listened to with keen attention.

"So, that is his theory, eh? Well, it may be so, but I doubt it. What is your opinion about it now, Billy?"

"I don't take any stock in that at all."

"And I take very little. Do you remember what Rosedale exclaimed when he was first informed that Miss Donaldson had lost her hand?"

"Perfectly well, sir."

"Well, I am not prepared to swear that young gentleman is innocent, yet, and I am going to look further into his case."

"The same thought has come to me, sir," Billy averred.

"Then work at it. I will take precious good care of this trap till the time comes to show what we have learned."

From there Billy went to the home of the wounded young lady.

The butler frowned upon him the moment he opened the door, and Billy was not given any chance to press in as he had done before.

"I want to see Mrs. Donaldson," Billy announced.

"What name, sir?"

"Washinghouse."

"You are the railroad man?"

"Yes."

"Come in, sir."

To Billy's surprise the butler stepped back, opening the door wide.

Billy entered, and the butler bowed him into the parlor, where he was left alone.

He wondered what had worked the change in his favor, but supposed it was the desire on the part of Mrs. Donaldson to further the interests of the suit she intended to begin against the railroad company.

Presently she entered the room, followed by a short, thickset fellow.

"There he is, sir," she cried, pointing straight at Billy.

"That's him, hey?"

"Yes."

Billy had risen to his feet, and looked at the man in amazement.

What did it mean?

He was not kept any time in doubt, for, advancing toward him, the short fellow displayed a pair of handcuffs, saying:

"Hold out your hands, sir, and don't you dare to resist if you know what's well for you. You are my prisoner."

Billy saw it all, or thought he did, and he smiled.

"You had better postpone this arrest, sir," he said, cheerfully.

"Why had I better postpone it?"

Billy displayed his badges, and the fellow stepped back, looking foolish.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Billy Weston, though you may never have heard of me."

"Broadway Billy?"

"So I am called, sir."

"Well, I'm blowed! Mrs. Donaldson, I can't arrest him. You have had one of the keenest detectives in New York here and never knew it. The story he told was only a fake to get into the house."

"Sir!" the woman cried, looking at Billy with scorn.

"I must admit the fact," Billy acknowledged.

"Since no one would be admitted, and as the police were bound to interview your daughter, we had to resort to a little fiction to gain the desired object."

"And why should the police want to interview my daughter?"

"Perhaps it will be as well if I do not explain before this gentleman."

"Are you satisfied, sir, that he is what he claims to be?" to the short man.

"I haven't the least doubt of it, madam," was the reply.

"Then I suppose I must accept him as such. You may go, sir. If you are needed further I will send for you."

"Very well, madam. Anything that is not the arresting of Broadway Billy, and I'm yours to command."

With that and a bow the fellow took his leave.

"Now, sir," said the woman to Billy.

"I have found it necessary to come here again, madam, as you see."

"As I see, sir, yes. What is it brings you?"

"I must have a further interview with your daughter."

"Why did you not come in your true character yesterday?"

"Because we did not want to alarm you needlessly."

"Alarm me, how?"

"By throwing suspicion upon your daughter. My errand was to prove whether the hand was really hers or not."

"And you have found—"

"That it was."

"Are you sure?"

"There can be little doubt, now."

"And what will be done?"

"I believe you are aware, now, how and where her hand was found, are you not?"

"If you refer to the hand that was found in the room where Mr. Haldemyer was murdered, yes."

"And Mr. Rosedale was the one who told you."

"He was. Since then I have read all about it in the papers."

"You had not seen it before?"

"No; for, owing to our trouble here we had not even heard of the old gentleman's death."

"Well, that is easily believed. But, madam, in order to clear herself entirely your daughter will have to explain *why* she was at Haddonfield that night."

"And that she will not do, not even to me."

"She will have to do it, for, by that will come the explanation of how her hand came to be found where it was, perhaps."

"And that must not be spoken of to her again, the doctor has so ordered."

"Why?"

"She was nearly crazed when Mr. Rosedale mentioned it to her."

"Then it was no news to her that her hand had been found there, instead of at the wreck? That looks bad—"

"I have not said or hinted anything of the kind, sir."

"Well, madam, I am here for the purpose of getting proof positive that she was actually in that railroad accident, and I must be satisfied."

"How can we satisfy you?"

"I must see the clothing she wore that night."

"It is not fit to be seen, all torn and blood-stained as it is."

"What kind of clothing had she on?—that is to say, what color was she clad in?"

"She was dressed in black. One of my old costumes."

"Then she went in disguise."

"Yes."

"Well, madam, are you aware that, even though your daughter went to Haddonfield that night, she was back in the city plenty time enough to have yet lost her hand at Mr. Haldemyer's house? You see the necessity for her making a confession."

The mother paled, and grasped a chair for support.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE SECRET COMES OUT.

BROADWAY BILLY hardly knew what to expect, now. The young woman certainly had not had her hand cut off by the trap on the safe, but yet it appeared that it was her hand which had been found there.

Was the mother aware of this? How had the hand come there? Had the young woman gone there before coming home, wounded though she was? And had the man she had met at Haddonfield come with her for the purpose of robbing the safe? Was that man the one whom Harry and Seth were after now?

These questions and more ran through his mind in a few brief moments.

"You surely do not accuse my daughter of that, do you, sir?" the woman cried, in accents of fear.

"What else can we suspect, when your daughter's hand was found there on the floor and her blood sprinkled all around the spot?" Billy demanded severely.

"But, she was not there, oh! she was not there, sir. She did not know a thing about it until Mr. Rosedale told her last night. If it is her hand, there is no accounting for the way it came there."

"There is only one thing that will prevent her arrest for Mr. Haldemyer's murder," Billy declared.

The poor woman wrung her hands despairingly.

"You cannot mean it."

"Can you doubt it? Your daughter lost her hand that very night, and it was found on the scene of the crime. Why, it is enough to hang her, without anything more. Can she clear herself?"

"Oh, have mercy on her, sir, have mercy!"

"That is out of my line," Billy returned. "If guilty, she must suffer. If innocent, let her clear herself. It all, now, remains with her."

He felt that the moment demanded him to push the matter to the utmost. It was now or never to get at the truth from the young woman herself. He had to be severe in order to carry his point.

"But, she will not talk, she positively will not talk, sir!"

"The worse for her, then. Does she realize the awful danger she is in?"

"Oh, I do not know. Please spare her, and do not drag her down, sir!"

"As I told you, she holds the matter in her own hands. If innocent, let her prove herself

so; that only will settle it. Take me to her at once."

"Oh, I cannot, sir, indeed I cannot!"

"Then I shall have to use my authority and go to her room in spite of you. I am here upon a matter of grim business, madam, and if you would not have me act harshly you had better comply with my request."

"I could have my butler throw you from the house, sir."

"He cannot do it, and if he could it would be the worse for him and would greatly hurt your case. The police would take possession of your house immediately, and your daughter would be put under arrest at once—probably taken away to prison."

"Do you mean it?"

"Do I look as if I were trifling?"

The woman yielded.

"Come with me," she said, and left the room. Billy followed, prepared for anything that might happen, and especially prepared to cope with the butler, if need be.

He had his hand upon a revolver, and would not have hesitated to threaten that worthy upon the least sign of hostility on his part.

But, the woman meant no treachery, and led the way direct to her daughter's room.

"The young gentleman to see you again, Julia," she said simply.

"But, mamma, you know now that he is not what he pretended to be," the girl cried.

"No, he is more; he is a police officer."

The girl's face turned the hue of death at that, and she cried:

"Oh! what do you want, then, sir? You must not arrest him, you shall not arrest him!"

Billy knew not what the secret was, but grasping the cue at once, determined to play upon the girl's fears.

"He has already been arrested," he assumed. "It will depend upon you to clear him, perhaps."

"Heavens! Then you know all?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"And he has confessed everything?"

"Would he not have to do so, to clear himself?"

"What do you mean?"

"You ought to know well enough what I mean."

"No, I do not, indeed I do not. His confession could not clear him, though it would bring ruin to me."

Billy had to change the matter abruptly.

"Do you know how your hand came to be in the murdered Mr. Haldemyer's library, Miss Donaldson?" the young detective demanded.

"I am sure it was not my hand that was found there, sir," she protested.

"We know it was, though, and you are likely to be arrested for a share in that crime, unless you state fully what business took you to Haddonfield, and so prove that you were in that railroad accident, and there lost your hand."

"Why need I tell you, now that you have heard it from him?"

"We must have proof positive. His tale may only have been made up to clear himself! If you left him there, at Haddonfield, he is not the murderer of Mr. Haldemyer; but, if he came back to the city with you, then it will go hard with both of you. Did you leave him there at Haddonfield?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Are you aware that he came here last night and paid a visit to Jarred Wyckham?"

"Did he do that?"

"He did, and so we got on his track."

"Then he has told him everything, and I am hopelessly ruined!"

She covered her eyes with her one hand, and a sob shook her frame. What was her secret?

"Julia?"

So spoke her mother.

The girl's sobbing was her only reply.

"Julia, who was that man?" the mother demanded. "What is this secret you have been keeping from me?"

"Oh, mamma, forgive me! Say you will forgive me, and I will tell you everything that I have been keeping from you so long."

"What was that man to you, I demand?"

"He was my—my husband!"

"Your husband?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Donaldson had to lay hold upon the foot of the bed for support, and perspiration broke out upon her pale face.

"You cannot mean to tell me you have been married!" she gasped rather than spoke. "You do not mean to tell me you are a wife, and have never told me!"

"It is true, mamma. I married him when at

school, and we lived together secretly at times when I went away from home after my first year out of school, when I told you I was visiting girl friends."

The girl's hand still covered her eyes.

"Why did you not tell me?"

"He would not let me do so, at first; then I discovered that he had another wife living. Then he committed a crime and had to run away. Oh! I thought him so good and true, mamma; and I loved him so well! I would have died for him, blind and foolish that I was."

Mrs. Donaldson was now weeping, too.

"Tell me all," she presently demanded. "Tell me everything, Julia."

"You do not hate me, mamma?"

"I pity you, my child."

The girl wept violently at that, and putting up her arm, her mother allowed her to embrace her and they wept together.

Broadway Billy stood by patiently until the outburst had begun to subside, when he said:

"Now, if you please, let me have the rest of this story. It will clear you of all concern in the Haldemyer affair."

"Why must I tell you, if you know it all?" the girl demanded.

"The confession must come from your lips. Let your mother be the witness to it. Tell your story to her."

"Yes, tell everything," the mother urged. "You will feel the better for having confessed to me. Now I can understand why you have been unhappy, my poor child!"

"Oh! I have been so unhappy!" the girl cried. "I thought myself a happy wife, only to awaken to the truth that I had been no wife at all. Even the marriage had been a sham. And then, when I came to love Jarred I knew I could never wed him. And you urged me to marry Clyde Rosedale, mamma, whom I almost hate, that at last I gave consent. I thought he would never know, and I would try to crush my love for Jarred and accept my fate as the punishment I deserved."

"My poor child!"

"On that fatal day I heard from Henry Petterton—that was the name of the rascal who so basely deceived me—and he threatened that unless I came to Haddonfield that night to see him he would come to the city and tell my secret to Clyde Rosedale, and so ruin my prospects. I cared nothing for Clyde; but to keep my own shame a secret I went, and when I saw the wretch he made a demand for a thousand dollars, which I was to take out to him on the following night. I missed the local train, and caught the Express as it slowed up at the station. Then came the accident, and how I ever got home I do not know, but I bore up till I reached here, and the rest you know."

"My poor child! my poor child!"

"You forgive me, mamma? Oh, say that you do forgive me!"

"I do forgive you, Julia, freely and fully. You have been punished enough for your folly."

"And you will not urge me to marry Clyde now, when it is only Jarred I love? I can never wed him, of course, and he need never know—But, he does know! Oh! how he will despise me, now!"

"I hardly think he will" Broadway Billy remarked. "I know him, and I think he has infinite pity for you. He paid the rascal last night, probably to have him keep the secret to himself. He told him the reason you had not kept your promise to him, too."

CHAPTER XVI.

BILLY SIGHTS LAND.

WHEN his business at the Donaldson residence was finally done, Broadway Billy went from there to his office.

It was time he had a communication from Harry and Seth, and he would probably find it there.

Instead of a message, however, the lads were there in person.

"Hello!" Billy exclaimed. "Back so soon?"

"Yes," answered Harry. "We have found our man, and he is in the jug."

"Arrested? What for?"

"For robbery there at Haddonfield," explained Seth. "They seem to have him in safe harness, too."

"Did you learn his name?"

"They call him Jim Brown, or that's what he calls himself."

"That is a false name. His real name is Henry Petterton. Come, and I will telegraph to Haddonfield at once and direct them to hold him on another charge as well."

"And they will be puzzled to know how

you heard of his arrest so soon," laughed Harry.

They went out, and Billy sent a telegram without delay.

That done, the trio went to the residence of Jarred Wyckham, where Billy asked to see that gentleman.

He was shown in, and in a moment Wyckham appeared.

"I have a piece of news for you," Billy explained, when their greeting was over.

"News for me?"

"Yes. I have knowledge that Miss Donaldson will refuse to marry Rosedale, now, even if he would take her minus one hand, and so, if you want her you have a clear field so far as he is concerned."

"What has led her to change her mind regarding Rosedale?"

"She was only marrying him to please her mother, while she loved only you. But, there was a reason why she could not wed you, so she accepted her fate."

Wyckham looked troubled but interested.

"And has that impediment been removed?" he asked.

"It has not. I heard her say that marriage with you would be still impossible."

"I think I know her reason for saying so, and I must make haste to assure her that such is not the case. I love her. That is sufficient."

"Then Henry Petterton told you the secret last night?"

The man looked amazed.

"What know you of him?" he asked.

"I know all about him, Mr. Wyckham," was the reply. "I have come to you for further proof against him. Will you testify against him?"

"Explain fully what you mean, please."

"Well, I mean this: If he told you the story about himself and Miss Donaldson, admitting his identity to you, will you testify against him and so convict him as he deserves to be?"

"I see you know that story, Mr. Weston."

"I have had it from the lady's own lips."

"Then I need not hold back longer. Yes, I will do that. He came to me, saying he could tell that about Miss Donaldson that would ruin her, and that he would do it unless I gave him some money for his present need. Before doing so, I told him I must know fully what he meant. He told me, I paid him some money to keep it secret until I could see the lady. Perhaps you can see that I had a double motive in it."

"I think I see light through the chink, sir."

"Yes, for you are shrewd. If the story were true, I meant to use it to my advantage, for I could forgive the foolish misstep of a girl while I knew Rosedale would not do so. Loving her, I would let her know that I knew her secret, and still ask her to be mine. In any event, I bought the silence of the rascal until she could deal with him herself, if she refused me. I explained to him why she had been unable to keep her agreement with him, and he promised to give her time. In case she did accept, then I meant to deal with the wretch as he deserved."

"Then he had not heard about her accident before, eh?"

"No; it was news to him."

"That is all. If you want to call at the Donaldson residence I think you will be favorably received. The young lady is aware that you know the secret, now, for I told her. Matchmaking is not in my line, but if I can do anything more to make two fond hearts beat as one, you have only to command me."

Wyckham accepted the joke with a smile, and Billy and his beagles took their leave.

They were soon at Headquarters.

"Well, what success?" he was asked at once.

"The best," Billy averred.

"What is it?"

"Proof that the girl is entirely innocent, and if the hand you have is hers it is a still greater mystery how it came where it was found."

He told his story in full, and it was listened to with keen interest.

"You and your boys have done a good stroke," he was complimented. "The proof is now positive that the young woman lost her hand on the train, for I have evidence to support the proofs you have."

"Yes?"

"Yes. My men have been searching around at the scene of that accident for the ring she lost, and have found it. Not only that, but also found some black dress stuff which I think will fit the rent you have described as being in the dress she wore."

"Show me the piece and I will tell you," said Billy.

A small package was opened and several articles taken out, one of which was the piece of goods named.

Billy spread it out and looked at it.

"It is the very piece," he declared. "There is no doubt about it."

"And this is the ring. You see it is just such a ring as she gave you the description of."

"It is not to be mistaken."

"The other articles do not amount to much, though they picked up everything in the nature of what might prove a clue."

"Is that a strap I see there?"

"Yes; it looks as though it may have been on a bag."

It was taken up and handed to Billy for inspection, and the young detective's heart almost stopped beating as he made the discovery.

"May I take this with me, chief?" he asked, calmly.

The eyes of the great thief-taker searched his face, but Billy made up his mind to let his countenance reveal nothing.

"What good will it do you?" he was asked.

"Perhaps no good; maybe a good deal. I have an idea."

"Well, take it along, Billy, for I know you do not ask the favor idly."

So, when Billy took his leave from there he carried the strap with him, firm in his belief that he had found a most important clue.

The funeral of the murdered man took place at one o'clock, and Billy Weston and other detectives were on hand at the house.

Some of the men went with the funeral cortege, but Billy remained behind when the mourners followed the body forth to its last resting-place.

The old housekeeper, too, had remained behind.

"Well, what more has been found out, sir?" she inquired, sorrowfully. "Is it possible that the murderer of Mr. Haldemyer is going to escape?"

"I hardly think he will escape," answered Billy, with significance. "Still, nothing more has been brought to light, so far, that will condemn any one."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I am here for the purpose of taking a thorough look through the house, while all the others are out, Mrs. Gernsey. Will you conduct us, or shall we go alone?"

The boys had joined him, immediately after the funeral left.

"Just as you wish, sir. You are welcome, I am sure, to go where you will in the house."

"Mr. Rosedale might object."

"Indeed, no! He has told me to give you every help possible, you know."

"Well, let us go up to his room, Mrs. Gernsey. We may find something there to help us solve the matter."

He watched her closely as he spoke.

Her countenance betrayed no new emotion, as she made answer:

"Just as you please, sir. Master Clyde will be only too well pleased to have you make the most thorough investigation. Come right this way, sir."

Billy and his team followed her, and they were shown into a front room on the next floor.

A swift look around revealed to Billy what he wanted.

It was Clyde Rosedale's valise.

"Is that the grip Mr. Rosedale brought home with him, Mrs. Gernsey?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"It is the one he usually carried?"

"Yes."

"I see he has added a new strap to it. Did he have that when he went away?"

"Well, I declare, I hadn't noticed that! No, he had both the old ones when he went away, for I buckled them for him in the hall, after he let me put some extra linen in for him. Anybody would remember the buckles."

"Yes, for the one I see there on the old strap is half-round."

"Yes. He's broken one, I suppose."

"Is this it?" and Billy took from his pocket the strap he had received at Headquarters.

"Christopher Columbia!" exclaimed Harry. "That's the mate to the old buckle there, boss! Where did you get it?"

He was all excitement.

Silent Seth was an imperturbable as ever, but deeply interested.

"That certainly is the lost strap, sir," the housekeeper agreed. "How did you get hold of

it? The buckle is broken, I see, and that's how he lost it."

"Yes, that accounts for it. It has been having hard usage, I should say, and the buckle could not stand the strain. With your permission I'll examine the valise a little, Mrs. Gernsey."

"Why, certainly, sir. I can tell you that just as free as Master Clyde would tell you himself."

Billy took up the valise and stood it on the table and essayed to open it, but he found it locked. And, not only so, but it was wired together in two places so that it would be impossible for a busybody to pry into it!

"The hard usage must have broken the lock, too, Mrs. Gernsey," he observed. "It is wired, you see. No danger of any one taking his purple and fine linen, I should say. But, this is wasting time. Let's examine things around, to see if the robber took anything else that night."

CHAPTER XVII.

EVERYTHING MADE CLEAR.

BILLY made a pretense of looking around for a few moments, and then, as though he had just thought of it, said to his team:

"Oh, you must go an errand, boys. Here, I will write a brief note, and you must hurry back again as soon as you can. I'll be done about the time you get here, I guess."

Hastily writing and directing a note, he gave it to them and they set out with it.

That note was directed to the superintendent of police.

Billy went through the house slowly from room to room, not with any object in view other than to kill time while he waited.

At last the inspection was done, and he went down to the library, where he said he would wait until his boys came back. He had been unable to discover anything more, he said.

Presently there was a ring, and the housekeeper admitted the boys, and with them two men who were strangers to her.

Billy had stepped out into the hall, and seeing who they were, said:

"Come right this way, please. I have something to show you."

He led the way to Rosedale's room.

"Superintendent," he said, "when I saw this strap in your office I was sure I had seen another like it, recognizing the old style buckle. There is the mate to it!"

"Then our first suspicion was right, inspector," the superintendent cried.

"So it looks, that's the fact. And, by heavens! the thing is wired shut! We must look into this."

Taking a strong key from his pocket he inserted the end of it under the loop of wire, and with a few turns the wire was broken. The other was served in the same way, and the valise was open.

The housekeeper, full of curiosity, had been standing near, and at sight of the contents she fell back with a gasp of dismay.

It contained the money, bonds, etc., which had been stolen from Mr. Haldemyer's safe!

"Broadway Billy, you have done a noble stroke this time!" the superintendent complimented. "The mystery is solved at last, or nearly so."

"I had some suspicion in this direction," Billy responded, "and now it seems I was right."

"And we'll soon have him right, too."

"You don't mean to say—" the housekeeper tried to get out, but she choked.

"We mean to say that the person who killed Mr. Haldemyer was none other than his nephew, Clyde Rosedale!"

Her dread was confirmed, and with a gasp she sunk down upon a chair, overcome.

A policeman was called and left in charge of the house, and the others retired from the scene, taking the valise with them.

A detective was left near the house to make the arrest as soon as Rosedale put in his appearance, and the others going back to Headquarters, prepared to give him a reception there.

The day dragged along, and at last it was time for them to expect the arrival of the prisoner.

What was their surprise, presently, to see him walk into the room alone.

"I want to see the superintendent," he said.

"Very well, sir, I am he," that officer spoke up.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"I have called to see if I might get that severed hand you have here, to restore it to its owner so that it may be decently buried. The supposed owner is my promised wife."

"We must have proof that it is hers before

"we let it go, sir," he was told. "And, having proof for that, it must be explained to our satisfaction how it came to be where it was found. Your coming for it speaks for your positive knowledge of its ownership, sir."

With those penetrating eyes upon him, no wonder the man grew confused.

"No, it is not that, sir," he said; "er, that is to say, I came here first to see the hand, and then if I identified it I was to ask for it. See?"

"Yes, I think I do," said the superintendent, grimly. "We have some other things here which may be of interest to you, too, Mr. Rosedale. For instance, this strap, which you will recognize at once."

At sight of it the man grew pale.

"Then, too, this valise, with its interesting contents," lifting the valise from the floor behind the desk and opening it and displaying its contents. "I think you find them highly interesting, do you not, sir? You appear to find them so, at any rate."

Clyde Rosedale acted as though gasping for breath. His face was the hue of death, his eyes were distended, and before he could recover, handcuffs were upon him.

The facts brought out at his trial were simple, after all.

He had plotted from the first to rob his uncle, and his trip to St. Louis was a part of the plot. He had an accomplice, one whom he could trust, and they were at St. Louis together. Rosedale returned to New York, by a northern route, for the purpose of doing the robbery. While he was gone his accomplice in St. Louis was to play his personality there for the purpose of proving an *alibi* if needed. Should his uncle communicate with him, the accomplice was to answer. It had not been his intention to murder his uncle, be it known; that was not in his thoughts.

He was on the train to which the accident happened. He had with him the severed hand of a negro, which he had obtained at a medical school in St. Louis, intending to spring the knife-trap, killing a cat with it for the purpose of having some blood to show, and leave the hand there on the floor. This, he believed, would baffle the police utterly, and he himself being in St. Louis, could never be suspected. But, the hand, he found, had become too old for the purpose, and he had thrown it away before the accident happened; but as he was crawling out of the wreck, unhurt himself, he picked up the very thing he wanted, a human hand, still warm with life! He cared not whose it was, and did not stop to weigh the risk he was running.

Arriving in New York, with the live cat in his valise all prepared for the deception, having burned all the hair from its neck and having it under the influence of a drug, he went at once to his uncle's house, letting himself in with the pass-key, and immediately he sprung the trap, killing the cat in it and sprinkling the blood around, and dropping the hand on the floor. Then he opened the safe, and was in the act of robbing it when his uncle came in. Taking up the knife, in his fright and desperation he stabbed him to the heart before he could give a sound of alarm. Hastening with his work, he left the house, leaving a false wire key in the door the further to deceive the police. He took the dead cat with him, throwing it into the river as he crossed the ferry. Going at once to Pittsburg he there communicated with his accomplice, and had an understanding of the case. The accomplice came on at once, and when they met at Pittsburg Rosedale took his ticket and came on to New York in the manner shown.

He had played a cute game, but his overdoing it had been his ruin. He was given the full benefit of the law, as it applied to his case, and his accomplice as well.

Henry Petterton was sent to prison for his crimes.

Jared Wyckham and the maimed Julia Donaldson were eventually married, and are living content and happy lives.

Broadway Billy and his boys received the praise they justly deserved for the manner in which they had handled their special case, and Happy Harry took heart again and thought there might be a little spark of detective ability in him, after all. Silent Seth was speechless, as usual, but, as Harry expressed it, he "sawed wood" just the same. And so we leave them for a time, until another case brings their combination into notice once more, when it will be our pleasurable duty to record the facts.

THE END.

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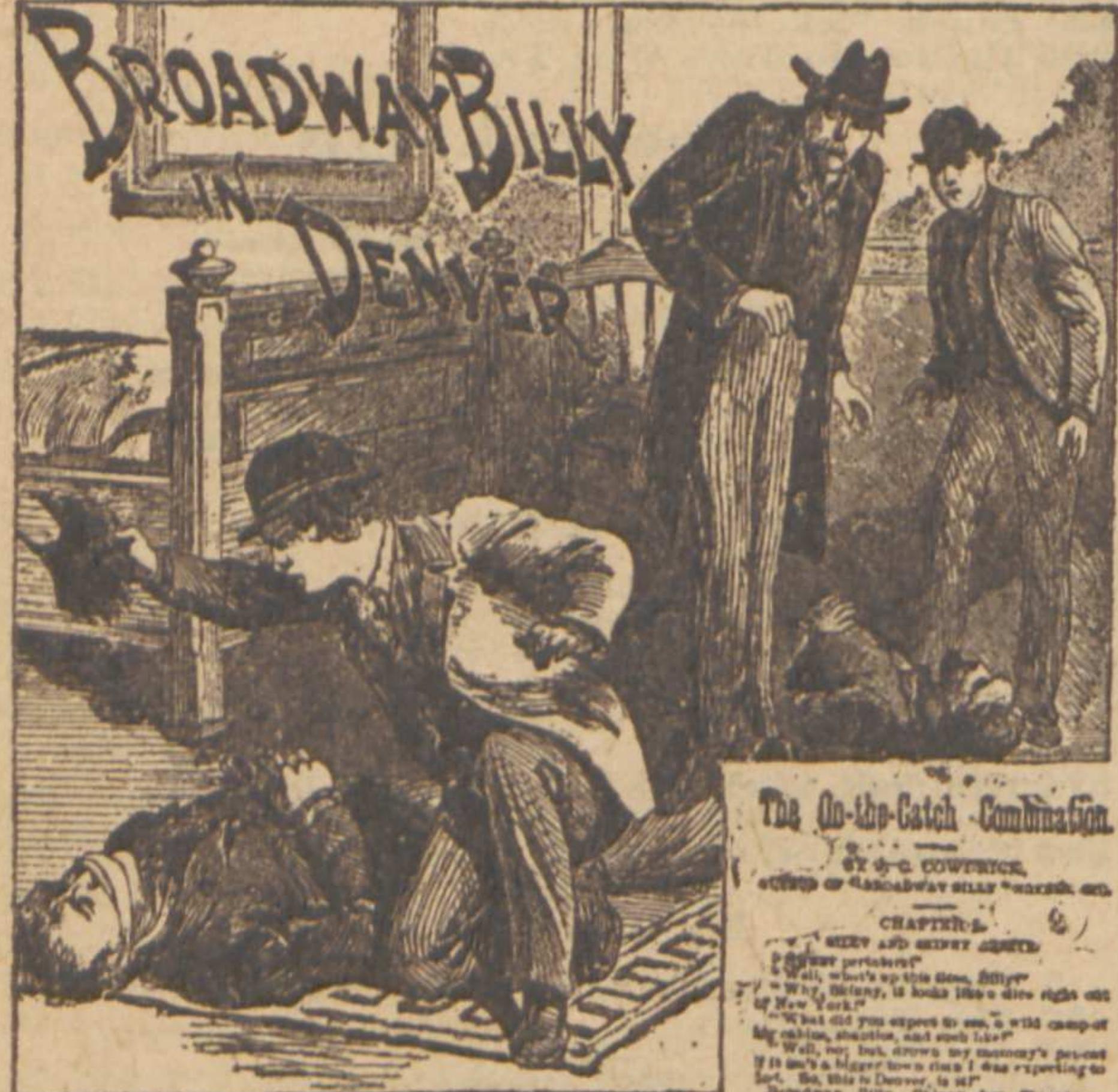
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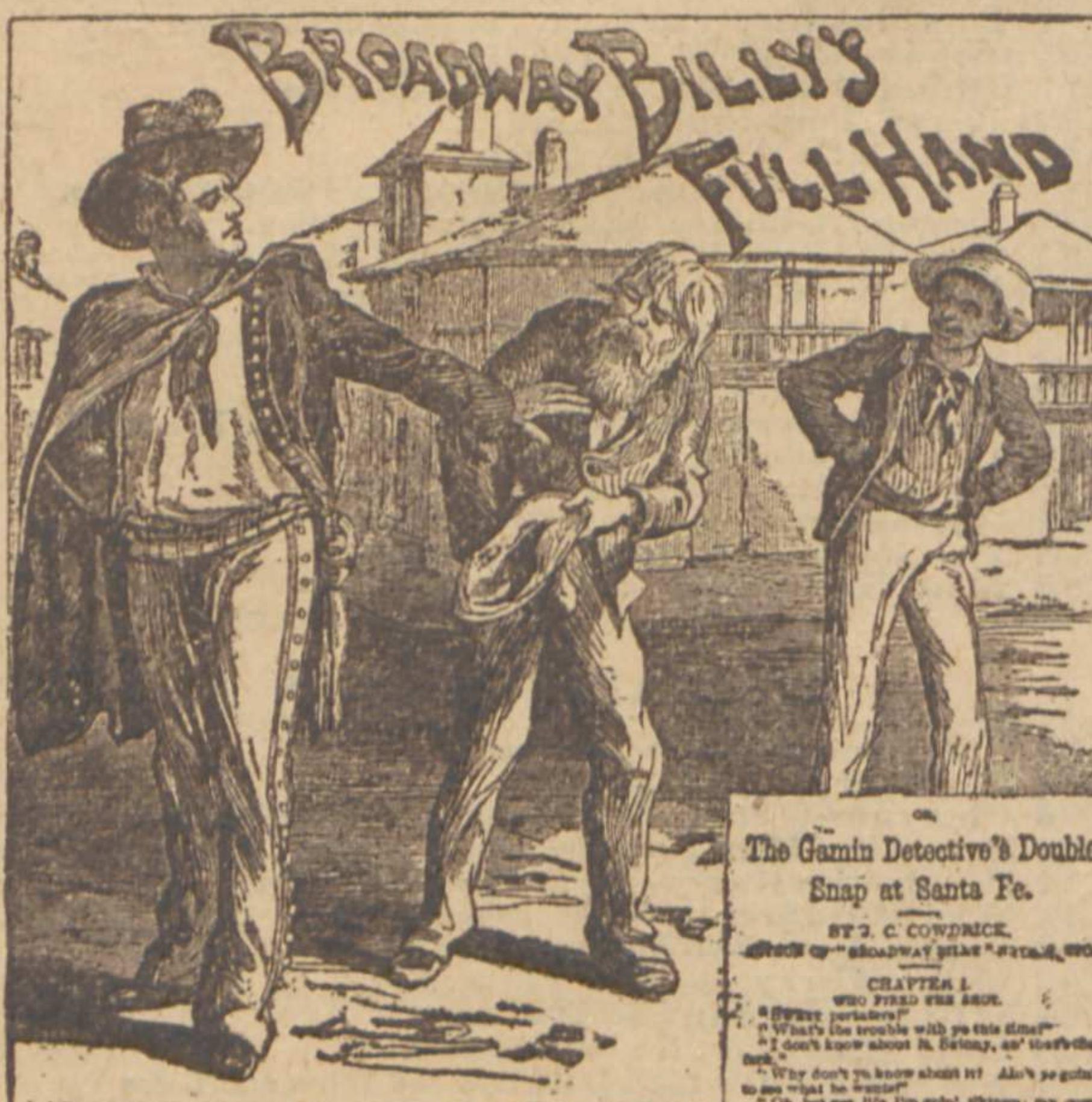
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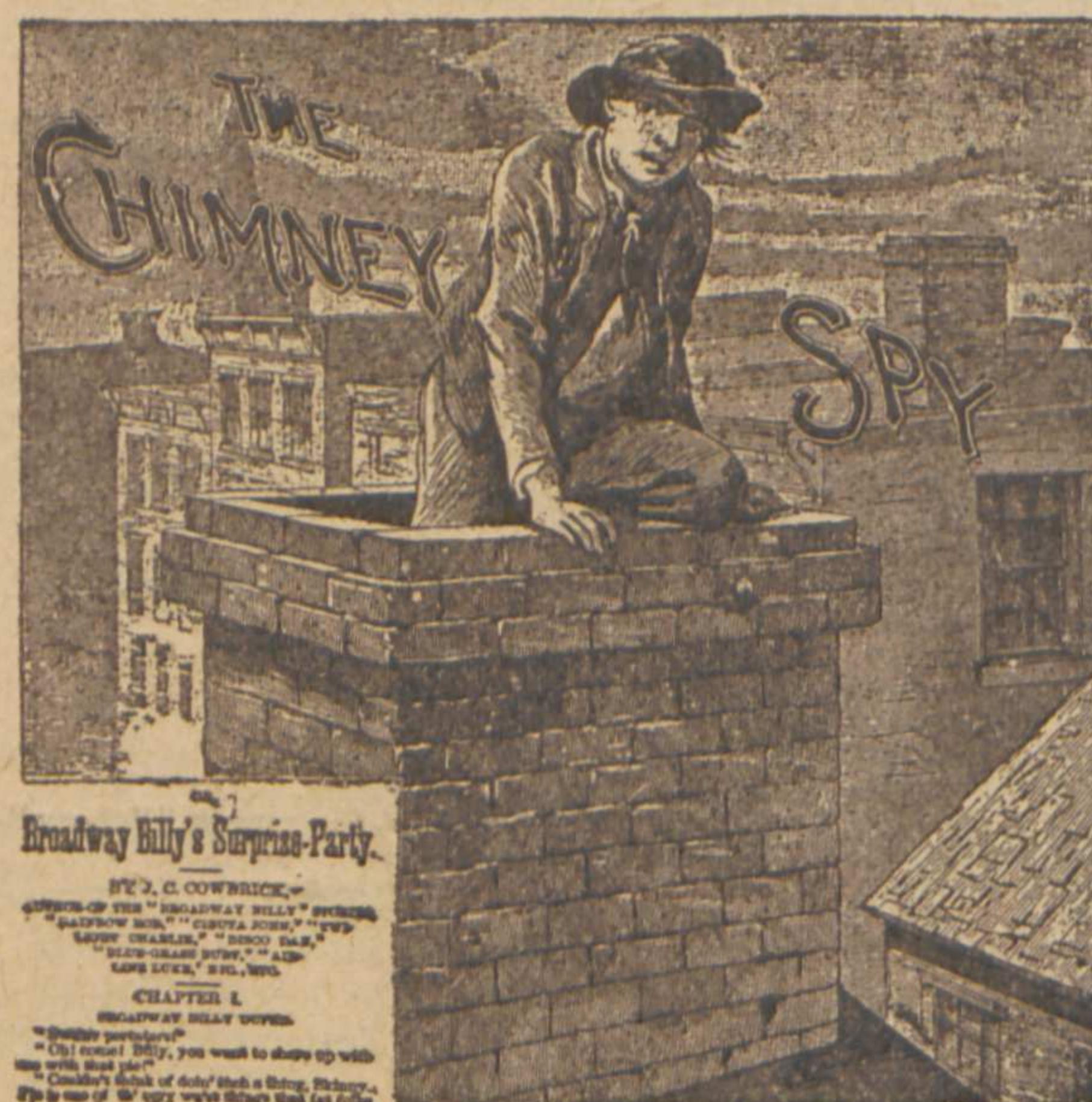
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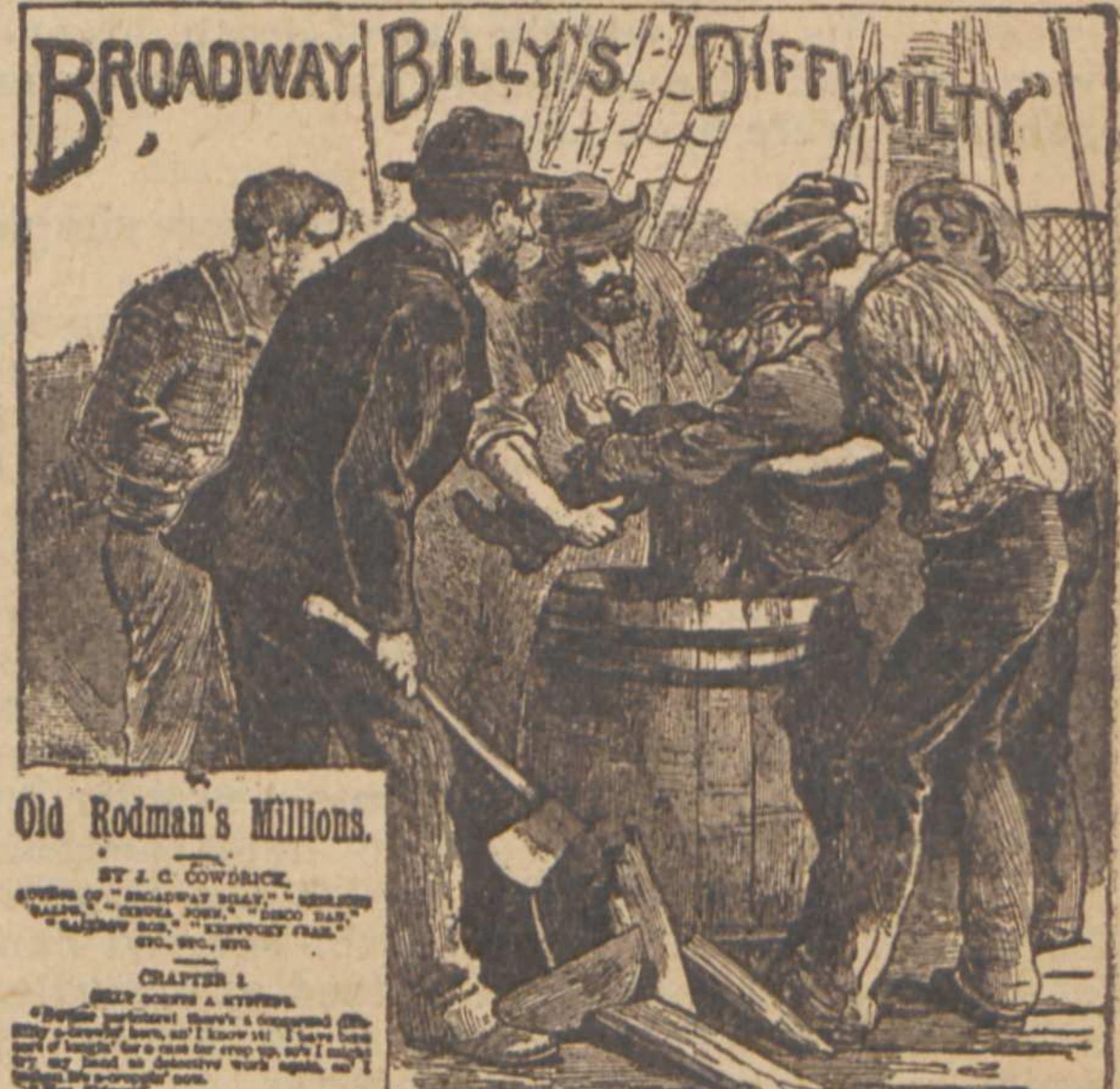


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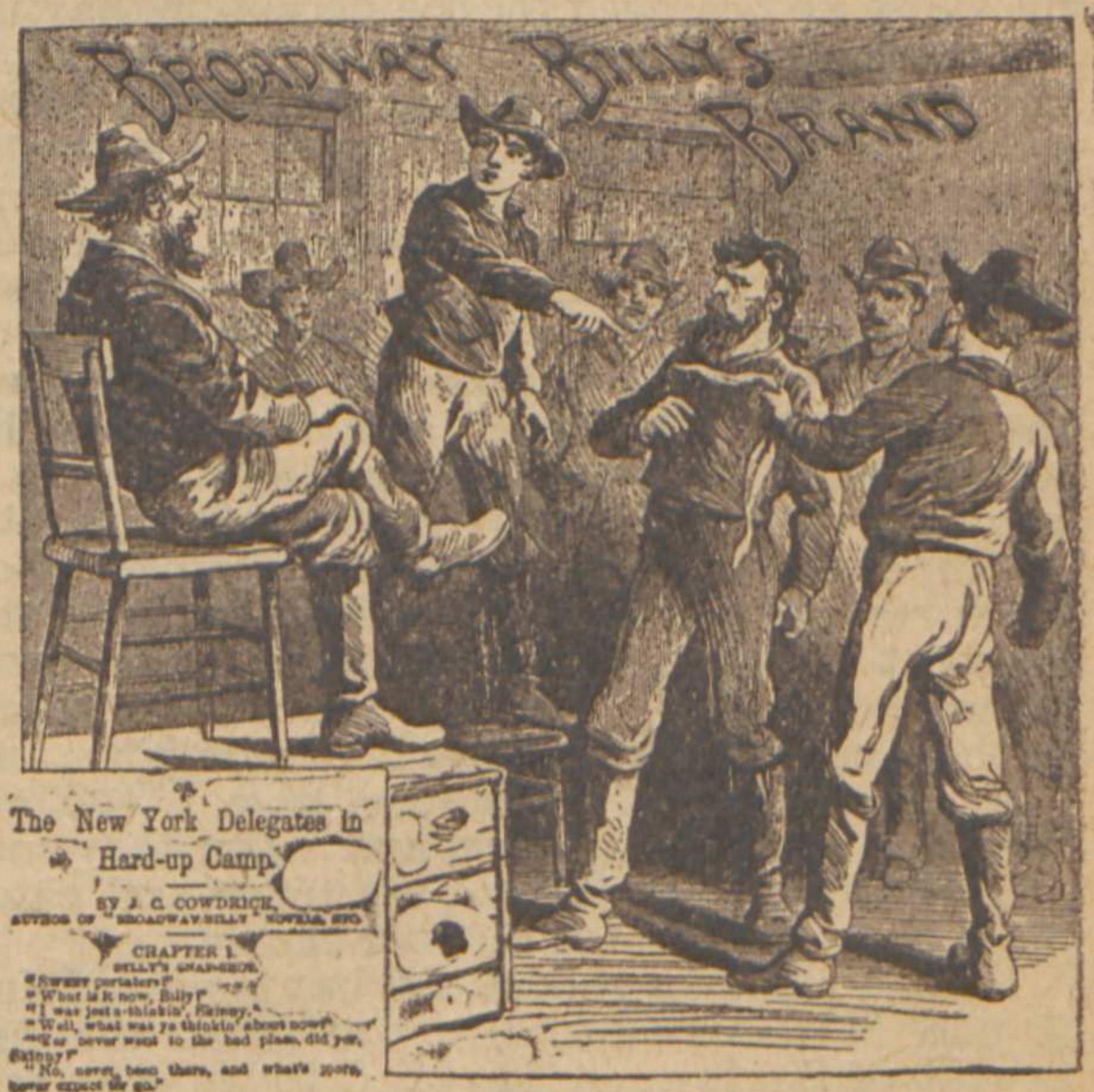


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